

**GUIDING THE PREPARATION AND PREACHING OF
BIOGRAPHICAL SERMONS
WITH GENRE SENSITIVITY IN THE CHINESE CHURCH**

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ABSTRACT

The Prayer of Jabez piqued the interest of the author of this thesis-project to explore the hermeneutical and homiletical issues on biographical preaching. The author also observed the need of training of biographical preaching among Chinese pastors in Toronto through a survey he conducted.

In his D.Min. studies, the author believes that genre sensitivity will enhance biographical preaching among pastors. He also conducted a workshop under this project for some Chinese pastors in Toronto, helping his fellow pastors preach biographical sermons faithfully and effectively. It is the author's hope that all readers can hone their skills too.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

In 2001, Dr. Bruce Wilkinson's *The Prayer of Jabez* generated great waves among Christian publishers and the secular media alike. *The Prayer of Jabez* proved to be very successful, appearing at the top of several best-seller lists for many weeks, including *USA Today*, *the New York Times*, and *Publishers Weekly*. The Evangelical Christian Publishers Association selected *Jabez* as the 2001 Book of the Year, and honored it with the prestigious Gold Medallion Book Award. By October 2001, *The Prayer of Jabez's* sales figure reached 9 million copies.¹

Not only was it overwhelmingly popular in North America, *The Prayer of Jabez* also stirred much interest among Christians in Taiwan. Between the months of August and September 2001, *Jabez* ascended to the top of the best seller lists in three of Taiwan's most popular Christian bookstores.² Furthermore, reports from 2006 showed that *The Prayer of Jabez* placed third on the best-seller lists in Chinese Christian books in Taiwan and North America between 2001 to 2005.³ The *Christian Tribune* also posted twelve articles discussing this book ; moreover, nine out of those articles were written by pastors (including one pastor who even turned the prayer into an aerobics exercise), showing that *Jabez* greatly influenced and aroused feedback among Chinese pastors in Taiwan. Needless to say, *The Prayer of Jabez* was widely welcomed, accepted and praised in Taiwan's Christian circle in the early 2000s.

¹ Roy B. Zuck, "Book Review: The Prayer of Jabez," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159, (January-March 2002): 112.

² This information was reported from Taiwan sole non-denomination Christian newspaper—*Christian Tribune*. Shing Yi Chiu, "Best Seller List," *Christian Tribune*, October 8, 2002.

³ Rong Jeng Lee, "Special Report on Chinese Christian Literature Conference," *Christian Tribune*, September 23, 2006.

The Problem and Research Question

Like classics such as *Streams in the Desert* or *My Utmost for His Highest*, Wilkinson's work has been very well received; unlike the aforementioned books, however, *The Prayer of Jabez* carries many deep theological errors. As one journalist put it, "The reaction (to the book) has been mixed. As testimonials pour in from people whose lives were turned around by the Jabez prayer, disgruntled comments pile up from those who see in this phenomenon yet another brand of 'name it and claim it' spiritual hucksterism."⁴ Despite its overwhelming sales and seemingly encouraging message about God's power, many book reviewers have discovered more reasons to object to *Jabez's* positions on theology, American culture, and Biblical validity.

The Prayer of Jabez has not only exacerbated arguments among theologians in America, it has also spawned hermeneutical and homiletical disputes and concerns among Chinese pastors in Taiwan and Toronto. In the latter half of this chapter, I will summarize three critical problems related to biblical interpretation and application on this disputable issue. For now, I would like to address how Chinese pastors in Taiwan and in Toronto have lacked discernment regarding *Jabez's* distortion of God's Word. As I mentioned above, among the twelve articles about *The Prayer of Jabez* in the Taiwanese Christian newspaper, nine were written by pastors, and ten were in full support of Wilkinson's interpretation. Unfortunately, it seems that many Chinese pastors and Christians were unable to discern Wilkinson's theological errors. Indeed, only two of the twelve aforementioned articles drew out *Jabez's* hermeneutical inconsistencies (my article, mailed from Toronto, was one of the two). God's people were led by a fad

⁴ Carol Zaleski, "The Prayer of Jabez." *Christian Century*, 23 May 2001, 42.

rather than the solid interpretation and biblical preaching of God’s Word. As preachers, we are to correctly handle the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). Otherwise, one would be sadly left to wonder, “Where is God’s faithful herald?”

While Chinese Christians and pastors in Taiwan were greatly influenced by *The Prayer of Jabez*, Chinese Evangelical pastors in Toronto were neutral. In August 2009, I conducted a survey in Toronto by sending out a questionnaire (see Appendix A) to forty Chinese pastors (36 responded). My sample selection included only those who are members of the Toronto Chinese Evangelical Minister Fellowship (the sole Chinese evangelical pastors fellowship in Toronto), and are either senior or lead pastors in their churches with congregations over 100 people (detailed description in chapter 4). The results (see Appendix D) showed that 67% of the responding pastors have read *Jabez*, and only 17% disagreed with its intrinsic message. Among all 36 pastors, only two pastors (5.5%) exhorted their congregation to be discerning, 8.3% advocated *Jabez*, and 86% kept silent.

Ordinarily, silence indicates tacit approval; the overwhelming silence among Toronto Chinese pastors shows that many of my fellow pastors failed to warn Christians to critically analyze Wilkinson’s disputable teachings. As pastors, we are entrusted with God’s Word— teaching, rebuking, correcting and training the Church in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). If a suspicious interpretation of Scripture is influencing Christians in our midst, we must stand up and preach the whole counsel of God, scorning difficulty and unpopularity. It is not easy to set forth assertions against fads. However, our predecessor, the Apostle Paul, has taught us that God’s servant should be determined to please God

instead of man (Gal 1:18). We also have encouragement from well-respected, contemporary preachers. In *The Preacher's Portrait*, Rev. John Stott clearly states,

Only such faithful exposition of the whole Word of God will deliver us and our congregations from little whims and fancies (whether ours or theirs), and from a more serious fanaticism and extravagance. Only so, too, shall we teach them to discern between what has been clearly revealed and what has not, as we do not fear to be dogmatic about the former but are content to remain agnostic about the latter (see Dt 29:29).⁵

When God's children are unduly influenced by fads, will faithful stewards help them distinguish sound teaching from whimsical fairy tales? In Taiwan, pastors and enthusiastic Christians were eager to promote and emulate what *The Prayer of Jabez* teaches. For example, a pastor encouraged his congregation to pray Jabez's prayer in 30 consecutive days and look for miraculous events. Using the limited reference the biblical text provides, these pastors would speculate haphazardly about the person of Jabez and leap into didactic messages about Jabez's magic formula. In Toronto, Christians were also led into folly, as Jabez's "effective prayer" became their spiritual guide. The pulpit was markedly silent on this issue. As God's faithful heralds and stewards, we must be as watchmen of the night—fully alert to recognize false teaching and warn Christians to hold fast to God's unshakeable truth.

After understanding the problems I perceive in my ministry context, I would like to summarize three hermeneutical problems *Jabez* raised. These three issues are genre misidentification, God-centered vs. anthropocentric message and the improper imitation of Bible characters.

Firstly, *The Prayer of Jabez* is a classic example of genre-misidentification. In the book, Dr. Wilkinson takes Jabez's prayer as a *norm* of prayer and teaches people to

⁵ John R.W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1961), 26.

copy the prayer verbatim. In fact the text merely depicts in laconic narration that Jabez prayed, and God answered his prayer. The narrative is descriptive, not necessarily prescriptive. Ryken states correctly that “each genre has its distinctive features and its own ‘rules’ or principles of operation.”⁶ In view of genre sensitivity, we need to deal with the text as narrative rather than didactic. As preachers, we can only preach and teach the text correctly and faithfully only if our sermons are in line with the characteristics of the genre employed by the text. In *Jabez*, Wilkinson misses some important features of narrative when he interprets and applies the text. For example, Wilkinson wrongly interprets the name Jabez to mean “pain.” Indeed, “[The] Hebrew word for Jabez is a pun on the word for pain.” Zuck elucidates,

His mother gave him a name that sounds like the word for pain . . . she used a wordplay to help people . . . remember her experience. The name “Jabez,” a meaningless word in itself . . . without actually naming her son ‘Pain.’ Thus it is incorrect to suggest that he lived a life of pain or was “weighted down by the sorrow of his past and the dreariness of his present.”⁷

Understood in this way, Wilkinson misinterprets the word because he neglected the artful use of language in narrative literature. Furthermore, as with all Old Testament narratives, we must deal with the historical-cultural gap, the stage of progressing revelation and redemptive history, the setting, point of view, and character (to name a few things). If Wilkinson had taken these factors into consideration, he would have found that this prayer is not the norm for prayer in light of New Testament teaching on prayer; indeed, Jesus taught us that the Lord’s Prayer is the true pattern of prayer. Unfortunately, *Jabez* treats this text as didactic and encourages people to pray what

⁶ Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 16.

⁷ Zuck, “Book Review: The Prayer of Jabez,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159, 112.

Jabez prayed verbally and verbatim as a timeless spiritual truth. Consequently, the ignorance of the distinction between genres may have led pastors and Christians to accept the flaws in *Jabez*.

My survey has indicated some clues as to why few Chinese pastors in Toronto have pointed out *Jabez*'s errors. In this survey, I found that 61% of the respondents (see Appendix E) have never taken a narrative preaching course. It could be assumed that many of our fellow pastors did not receive training in interpreting narrative literature. On the one side, such pastors would tend to misinterpret a narrative text and then wrongly develop a sermon using a didactic, analytical outline as *Jabez* did; on the other side, the pastors' lack of sensitivity regarding the narrative genre may have induced them to be indifferent to the errors of *Jabez*. Indeed, there is an obvious need to equip these Chinese pastors in handling narrative texts in preaching.

The second hermeneutical problem *The Prayer of Jabez* demonstrated is a very problematic approach of interpretation that encourages anthropocentric, rather than theocentric, preaching. In view of the interpretation of the Bible Greidanus upholds a God-centered focus: "As religious literature, the Bible reveals its theocentric nature."⁸ In the same way, when talking about reading Old Testament narratives, Fee and Stuart remind us that "one crucial thing to keep in mind . . . is the presence of God in the narrative. In any biblical narrative, God is the ultimate character, the supreme hero of the story."⁹ However, Wilkinson, along with his supporters, focused on Jabez and his

⁸ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 114.

⁹ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 98.

miraculously effective prayer while ignoring God and His sovereignty. In the conclusion of Chapter Two, Wilkinson states: “His kindness in recording Jabez’s story in the Bible is proof that it is not who you are . . . [W]hat counts is knowing who you want to be and asking for it. Through a simple, believing prayer, you can change your future. You can change what happens one minute from now.”¹⁰ Indeed, Jabez and his prayer (or *you* the reader and *your* prayer) becomes the centerpiece of the message rather than God; moreover, Wilkinson emphasizes the controlling power on human side which is eerily similar to the preaching of the prosperity gospel and individualism optimism. Thus *Jabez* is anthropocentric interpretation and preaching which should be rejected. As preachers, we should always preach God’s Word from a God-centered perspective basing our work on theocentric interpretation.

The third problem is an issue of application—namely, Wilkinson improperly encourages his readers to imitate Bible characters. When highlighting Jabez and his prayer in the last chapter of the book, Wilkinson applies this text and challenges his readers to “pray the Jabez prayer every morning . . . write out the prayer and tape it in your Bible, day-timer, on your bathroom mirror.”¹¹ Wilkinson instructs the contemporary readers to take Jabez as a model and mimic what Jabez did in the ancient days. In spite of the questionable content of the prayer, what catches my attention is *the way* that Wilkinson applies this text. His way to apply the text is called the *exemplary approach* in the area of hermeneutics-homiletics. In the English-speaking world, sermons constructed according to this method have been termed “biographical

¹⁰ Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 29.

¹¹ Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez*, 86.

sermons.”¹² Namely, biographical preaching is “using the characters in the preaching-text as examples or models for imitation.”¹³ However this approach is strongly opposed by some theologians.¹⁴ One major reason they oppose this method is “because the reality of the historical gap . . . the persons in the text do not fit our situation exactly; we cannot literally do the same things they did.”¹⁵ For instance the historical text that Abraham offered his son as burning sacrifice doesn’t mean that we are required to do the same thing as Abraham did. Anyone who encouraged people to do so would be misinterpreting the text. In the same way if we copy what Jabez prayed in every detail as Wilkinson urges, we will be led to the pitfall of improper imitation of Bible characters. Therefore the issue of “imitating Bible characters” is the third problem that needs deeper exploration.

Certain theologians, like B. Holwerda, K. Schilder, D. Van Dijk, Sidney Greidanus, disagree with biographical preaching: “Imitating Bible characters . . . is a dead-end road for true biblical preaching.”¹⁶ However many great preachers still uphold the preaching of biographical sermons. Clarence Edward Macartney wrote, “I discovered early in my ministry that people like biography; and nowhere is there such biography, so stirring, so moving, so uplifting, so tragic, as that to be found in the

¹² Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 65.

¹³ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 161.

¹⁴ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 56-120.

¹⁵ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 73.

¹⁶ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 163.

Bible.”¹⁷ Therefore I am concerned in this thesis-project with the focal issue *Jabez* raised: whether we are able to preach Bible biography *properly*. As I have mentioned above, God should be on the center of the narrative. Thus, my research question is: How can Toronto Chinese pastors preach biographical sermons theocentrically?

Thesis-Project

In the preceding discussion I pointed out that Wilkinson handled the text of *Jabez* without considering the genre of the text, either in whole or in part. Had he done so, his exposition would come closer in doing justice to the text. I already mentioned that (according to my survey) 61% of the responding pastors have never taken a narrative preaching course. The survey also evinces that 92% of the pastors preached biographical sermons in the last two years, with 75% preaching biographical sermons more than two times. However, about 60% have not received any training in biographical preaching (see Appendix E).

In summary, Toronto Chinese pastors are not only devoid of proper training in narrative preaching, but also of biographical preaching. I believe the study of biographical sketches from a genre-sensitive perspective will reduce many common errors that accompany the preaching of Bible characters. My thesis is the following: The hermeneutical flaws of biographical preaching in Chinese churches can be avoided by training the Chinese pastors to preach biographical sermons with sensitivity to genre.

I will defend my thesis by asserting the legitimacy of biographical preaching based on a biblical/theological foundation in Chapter 2.

¹⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Bible Personalities* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2005), 10.

In Chapter 3 I will review pertinent literature from theological, literary and preaching perspectives.

In Chapter 4 I will explain my project design. This section will include the training manual to be used for training Chinese pastors, the main procedure of the training workshop, and evaluation method.

Finally, I will state the outcomes of the thesis and the future outlook for biographical preaching in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

After describing the problem and setting in Chapter 1, I will now provide a biblical/theological framework for my thesis, arguing that biographical preaching is a legitimate and effective way of nourishing God's people. In this chapter, I will present the fundamental ideas of this thesis (based on biblical evidence and theological standpoints) through the following three propositions: first, Bible characters play an important role in God's Word. Second, it is legitimate to imitate Bible characters. Third, it is legitimate to preach biographical sermons.

Bible Characters Play an Important Role in God's Word

In this section I will argue for the importance of Bible characters from three aspects: First, I believe the Bible is the divinely inspired word of God; second, God uses Bible characters to reveal His inspired truth; third, it is important to study Bible characters for understanding the text.

Since we are to discuss Bible characters, we need to understand the nature of the Bible first: the Bible is the divinely inspired revelation of God. God proclaims the nature of His Word in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Based on God's self proclamation, we know that the Bible is neither a profane historical script nor a story book (although history and story-like contents are found in the Bible.) By contrast, the Bible is a special

book from God. On the one hand, the book is written in a special way by God; on the other hand, the book serves a special purpose. We may understand the former assertion by reading 2 Peter 1:20-21: “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Undoubtedly, God is the divine author of the Bible through the work of the Holy Spirit. However, the authorship is dual, including the people God chose. Erickson makes a definition of this inspiration: “By inspiration of Scripture we mean that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they actually wrote being the Word of God.”¹ Kaiser Jr. explains more explicitly:

The Spirit of God did not mechanically whisper the text into the writer’s ears, not did the authors experience automatic writing. Instead, they experienced a living assimilation of the truth, so that what they experienced in the past by way of culture, vocabulary, hardships, and the like was all taken up and assimilated into the unique product that simultaneously came from the distinctive personality of the writers. Just as truly, however, it came also from the Holy Spirit!²

God gives us His Word in a special way. Thus, while we respect the book as God’s Word, we must understand that it was written in a different context of times, culture and personality of human authors (though the authors were guided by the Holy Spirit).

Regarding my latter assertion (the purpose of the book), according to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (see above), God wrote this book not for the sake of historical record or other purposes but to reveal Himself, His work, and the God-pleasing life. Warfield says: “the

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 225.

² Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Meaning of Meaning,” in *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 2007), 41-42.

other (special revelation) is addressed to a special class of sinners, to whom God would make known His salvation. . . . to rescue broken and deformed sinners from their sin and its consequences.”³ Berkhof comments: “Special revelation is rooted in the redemptive plan of God, is addressed to man as sinner, can be properly understood and appropriated only by faith, and serves the purpose of securing the end for which man was created in spite of the disturbance wrought by sin.”⁴ Thus, although the Bible was written in the ancient days, God still speaks to man (as sinner) today! Stott addresses this point by quoting Galatians 4:22 and Hebrews 3-4, which respectively state that the Holy Spirit still speaks to us through the Old Testament texts. Stott concludes: “God’s Word is contemporary: it moves with the times and continues to address each fresh generation.”⁵ Indeed, the Bible is a divinely inspired book which speaks to us today. We should understand it, listen to it and observe it carefully.

Second, God uses Bible characters to reveal His inspired truth. In the above paragraphs, we submitted that the Bible, from the human portion, is written in the context of various backgrounds of the authors. Moreover, there are many genres in the written Word. Fee and Stuart say,

One of the most important aspects of the human side of the Bible is that, in order to communicate his Word to all human conditions, God chose to use almost every available kind of communication: narrative history, genealogies, chronicles, laws of all kinds, poetry of all kinds, proverbs, prophetic oracles, riddles, drama, biographical sketches, parables, letters, sermons, and apocalypses.⁶

³ B. B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 6.

⁴ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 37.

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 101-102.

⁶ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 22.

Among all genres used in the Bible, “narrative” is most common genre in the Bible. For example, Genesis (the first book of the Bible), is comprised of stories regarding Adam, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. The rest of the Old Testament introduces the stories of Moses, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, David, Esther, etc. Besides, we also find that there are thousands of less known characters and their stories in the Bible. L. M. Perry tells us that there are 2,930 different Bible characters.⁷ Larsen tells us that in the New Testament, Apostle Paul’s epistles carry the names of ninety-nine different persons while the book of Acts provides 110 different names of persons in its annals of the primitive church.⁸ No wonder Greidanus says: “Of all the biblical genres of literature, narrative may be described as the central, foundational, and all-encompassing genre of the Bible. . . In fact, the Old Testament as a whole (as well as the New Testament) is built on a narrative frame.”⁹ Obviously, Bible characters and their stories permeate God’s Word; “story” seems to be God’s most common form of communication of His truth to us. Indeed, the Bible proves that God uses Bible characters to reveal His inspired truth.

Third, Bible characters are not mere furnishings in biblical stories. On the contrary, Bible characters play an important role in the development of the narrative and the meaning of the text. Generally speaking, the stories of the Bible (just as regular stories), are comprised of three basic elements — plot, character and setting.¹⁰ Ska says,

⁷ Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 15.

⁸ David Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), 191-192.

⁹ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 188.

¹⁰ Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 53.

“Biblical narratives, as many traditional narratives, focus more on the action than on the development of particular characters.”¹¹ Ryken views this issue in a more balanced way: “Actually, these two ingredients (plot and character) set up a creative tension in a story. Some stories are more thoroughly plot stories, others more thoroughly character stories, but stories are finally an interaction between plot and character.”¹² Arthurs also says: “Old Testament stories, like other stories, center on the struggles of a protagonist, usually hindered or opposed by an antagonist.”¹³ Given these statements, one may conclude that Bible stories always revolve around the plot (or action) and characters together. Edwards contends with the same view: “The characters that populate the story are vital to the story itself. It is impossible to separate plot from character; they can’t exist independently Character is the rope that lashes a story together. You cannot understand a passage of narrative literature unless you understand the characters that walk across its scenes.”¹⁴ One can see that “Bible characters” play an important role in its “given text” and people should pay due attention in understanding the meaning of the text i.e. it is important to study the Bible characters for understanding the text which those personages inhabit.

In summary, the argument resulting from the study above is that the Bible is the divinely inspired revelation of God; Bible characters are inherently connected with the

¹¹ Jean Louis Ska, “*Our Fathers Have Told Us*” *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Literature* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1990), 17.

¹² Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 71.

¹³ Jeffrey D. Arthurs, “Preaching the Old Testament Narratives,” in *Preaching the Old Testament*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 79.

¹⁴ J. Kent Edwards, *Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching: The Steps from Text to Narrative Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 57.

inspired truth; and familiarity with the Bible character is important for understanding the text in which the personage is found. If we want to preach the whole counsel of God's Word, we should pay due respect to studying "Bible character" in Scripture because Bible characters play an important role in God's Word. Warren Wiersbe states: "Scripture records the great salvation narrative, which employs a cast of thousands of characters We preach Bible biography because we preach the Bible and cannot avoid the characters who inhabit its pages."¹⁵

It Is Legitimate to Imitate Bible Characters

After recognizing the importance of the character of the Bible, in this section, I will argue for the legitimacy of advocating the imitation of Bible characters in preaching. In biographical preaching, we often use the Bible characters in the given text as examples or models for imitation. Regarding this issue, I will begin from the view point of the Old Testament, then of Jesus, the Apostles and theologians.

In the Old Testament, God reveals that He created humans in His image and likeness, i.e. God wants us to be like Him. He created people to be capable of emulating His nature.

Genesis 1:26-27: God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." In this two verses, God mentions "image" three times and "likeness" one time. Further, God also let people rule over earthly things as He rules over the universe. The Psalmist

¹⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Bible Personalities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 10.

says: “How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne” (Ps 47:2, 8). We are like God by sharing his communicable attributions and His creative and managing capabilities; only, we take a comparatively smaller responsibility in the scope of His creation.

Erickson says,

The image is the power of personality that makes humans, like God, beings capable of interacting with other persons, of thinking and reflecting, and of willing freely. . . The image is that set of qualities . . . they are those qualities of God . . . The attributes of God sometimes referred to as communicable attributes constitute the image of God. . . . Jesus’ character and actions will be a particularly helpful guide in this matter since he was the perfect example of what human nature is intended to be.¹⁶

Ross explicates this passage in the same viewpoint,

The term “image” . . . figuratively describes human life as a reflection of God’s spiritual nature; that is, human life has the communicated attributes that came with the inbreathing (Gen 2:7). Consequently, humans have spiritual life, ethical and moral sensitivities, conscience, and the capacity to represent God. . . . Human life . . . thus has great capacity and responsibility by virtue of being the image of God. First . . . If humans are to imitate God, then creating life is a basic part of that task. . . . Second, humans are to have dominion over the world. . . Now believers are called on to be conformed to the image of Christ, who is the image of the Father.¹⁷

In light of this understanding, human beings are apt to imitate whom (God) they are supposed to in their nature. It is no surprise that we have this prevailing axiom: “Like father, like son,” because we are created inherently to be capable of imitating, and the ultimate goal is to emulate His nature.

However, people fall and are not capable to be like God as He planned. When we are in Christ, God restores us (according to his predestined plan) to be conformed to

¹⁶ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 532-533.

¹⁷ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 112-113.

the likeness of his Son (Rom 8:29). And God's plan will be realized and we will be like Him eventually when He appears (1 Jn 3:2). For the need of concrete models of godly image to be emulated, God set some people as examples to be followed, and some as negative examples to be shunned.

In Genesis, God commends some people through the narrator: Enoch walked with God 300 years (Gen 5:22); Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God (Gen 6:9); Abram believed the Lord, and God credited it to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6); The Lord prospered Joseph (Gen 39:2). Also, God rebukes some people through narration: Adam and Eve violated God's instruction; Cain killed his brother; people in Noah's time were very wicked; God stopped people who built the tower of Babel. Occasionally, God directly condemned men: "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous . . ." (Gen 18:20). At times, God would condemn certain people, through (the) characters in the story. For example, in Genesis, Rebekah said to Isaac: "I am disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women *like* these, my life will not be worth living." (Gen 27:46). In this case, we can all understand that Rebekah expected Jacob to marry someone more *like* a godly model rather than the Hittite women. Thus, in a normal situation, we are supposed to imitate some good models who walk in conformity with God's will.

After the days of the patriarchs God warned Israel through Moses that they should discern whom they would follow or imitate before they entered into Canaan: "You must *not do as they do* in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must *not do as*

they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. *Do not follow* their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. . . . Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. . . . for all *these things were done* by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. . . . Everyone who *does* any of *these detestable things*—such persons must be cut off from their people. Keep my requirements and *do not follow* any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the Lord your God.” (Lev 18:3-4, 24, 27, 29-30).

During the days of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, through prophets or narrators, God advised, commended and censured the kings with a pattern such as the following: “do right in the eyes of the Lord . . . as David my servant did” or “walk in the way of your father” and so on. This pattern is repeated in 1 Kings as follows:

	King	Medium	Text
Advice	Jeroboam	Prophet Ahijah	11:38 If you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you.
Commend	Jehoshaphat	Narrator	22:43 In everything he walked in the ways of his father Asa and did not stray from them; he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. 15:11
Censure	Omri	Narrator	16:25-26 But Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord and sinned more than all those before him. He walked in all the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat and in his sin . . . 11:33; 14:8; 15:3, 26, 34; 16:30-31; 22:52-53

Verdict	Ahab	Prophet Elijah	21:22, 25-26 I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat and that of Baasha son of Ahijah . . . (There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord . . . like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel.)
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Table 1. The Pattern of Emulating Predecessors in 1 Kings

God inspired the narrator to keep all of the records of those kings regarding their behavior and relations with God for the sake of edifying the people of Israel (original hearers). It is obvious that the repeated actions of the kings of Israel or Judah gave the Israelites a clear message: if they follow good examples who “did right” in the eyes of the Lord, their family and nation would be blessed; if not, they would experience calamity and judgment from God.

While the Old Testament provides ample evidence that God instructed us to follow good examples and avoid bad examples, the New Testament also affirms that we should discern whom to imitate or walk with. In the Beatitudes, Jesus urged people to aim at a goal: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Further, in the Gospels, Jesus used ancient and contemporary people as models for the hearers to either emulate or avoid. On the one hand, Jesus did not refrain from praising what people did for Him or for God’s glory. We are all familiar with the stories about the impoverished widow’s donation and the incident of Mary anointing Jesus at Bethany – indeed, at the end of the latter story, Jesus said, “Wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (Mk 14: 9). Jesus wants us to gaze upon good examples. He appreciates the faith of centurion by saying that “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone of Israel with such great faith” (Mt 8:10); he praises the Canaanite woman, “You have great faith” (Mt 15: 28); he asks Martha to set

priorities and learn from Mary by saying, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (Lk 10: 41-42). Jesus also talked about the desire of the Queen of the South to listen to wisdom (Lk 11:31) and the repentance of the men of Nineveh (Lk 11:32). Jesus encouraged people (and us) to imitate positive examples who “did right” in His eyes. On the other hand, Jesus warned his disciples to avoid bad examples such as “hypocrites, for they love to pray in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men...do not keep on babbling like pagans...Do not be like them” (Mt 6: 5-8). Jesus also mentioned negative examples in the Old Testament: Sodom and Gomorrah (these two cities are representing the people living in these two cities) (Mt 10:15); the killing of righteous Abel and Prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah (Mt 23:35-36). When Jesus spoke of the end times, he said: “Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. . . . It was the same in the days of Lot. . . . It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. . .” (Lk 17:26-30). Jesus warns us that we should be wary of the lifestyles of Noah and Lot’s days, and that it is dangerous for people to not know that judgment is near. He also warns people by saying “Remember Lot’s wife!” (Lk 17:32). Lot’s wife who treasured the world is a negative example we should avoid. After studying the Scriptures above, one can see that it is legitimate to use Bible characters as examples to follow or flee.

The Apostle Paul, similarly, urges believers to follow good examples. First of all, he encouraged people to conform to the likeness of “His Son” (Rom 8:29). Paul also asked his audience to take *Paul himself* as a model by saying, “follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). He mentioned that the church of

Thessalonians was a good imitator and, thus, being imitated by other churches: “You became imitators of us and the Lord...your faith in God has become known everywhere.”(1 Thes 1:6-7). The Apostle Paul also urged Timothy to set a good example for believers (1 Tim 4:12). In his letters to the church of Corinth Paul warned them to avoid bad examples as well. He mentioned that Israeli committed sins and were killed in the wilderness, concluding that “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warning for us” (1 Cor 10:11). As for other Apostles, in the book of Hebrews, after using one whole chapter to discuss many heroes of the faith, the author exhorts us: “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb 13:7). James used Abraham and Rahab as examples in terms of faith and deeds (Jas 2:21-26); Job in terms of perseverance (Jas 5:11); Elijah in terms of the prayer of faith (Jas 5:17-18). The Apostle Peter urged Christians to live holy and godly lives by illustrating good examples like Noah and Lot, and bad examples as Balaam (2 Pet 2:5-8, 15).

In summary, in addition to God and his Son Jesus Christ, prophets in the Old Testament and apostles in the New Testament urge believers, for the purpose of edification, to imitate good examples or avoid bad examples. Accordingly, there are many Bible characters being models that we can gaze upon, in order to advance our spiritual lives and act in line with God’s will. Ryken calls these models “heroes.” He says: “The largest branch of narrative is heroic narrative.” Ryken explicates the “hero” and the function of this heroic narrative,

The true hero expresses an accepted social and moral norm; his experience reenacts the important conflicts of the community which produces him. . . . Most important of all, the narrative of his experience suggests that life has both a significant pattern and an end. . . . They are also models or paradigms of the

religious experience of the human race. . . . They give us a memorable gallery of moral and spiritual models to emulate.¹⁸

Ryken does not forget negative examples: “On the other hand, stories can also inculcate a positive ideal by negative example.”¹⁹ Pratt also contends,

Old Testament writers intended for many of their characters to elicit sympathetic responses of approval. Characters take on the qualities of heroes or models of appropriate attitudes and behavior that the audience was expected to appreciate and admire. . . . Old Testament writers also designed some characters to evoke antipathetic responses. They behave in ways that the audience was to reject and, in extreme cases, they aroused contempt in the hearts of readers.²⁰

Even Chapell, a strong upholder of Christ-centered preaching, admits that “God remains the hero of every text.” He also admits that biblical characters have exemplary qualities for us to emulate by quoting Romans 15:4 and Philippians 3:17.²¹ Since the Bible is not only for the original audience but also for us (Rom 15:4), we are expected to respond positively or negatively to those Bible characters in line with the inspired authors’ intent.

In conclusion, I would like to assert the legitimacy of imitating Bible character explicitly (concretely and laconically) by quoting what Arthurs states,

James inspires us to pray like Elijah because “the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective”(Jas 5:16). First John 3:12 clearly offers Cain as a negative moral example: “Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother.” No wonder Goldingay concludes that “Using biblical stories to provide examples of how believers should or should not behave is thus a quite biblical procedure.”²²

¹⁸ Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 75-77.

¹⁹ Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 77.

²⁰ Richard L. Pratt, Jr., *He Gave Us Stories* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1993), 147-148.

²¹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 303.

²² Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 67.

In addition to the Biblical evidence I set forth, the aforementioned statements of scholars from theological, biblical and literary perspectives, reaffirm that it is truly legitimate to advocate imitating Bible characters in preaching.

It Is Legitimate to Preach Biographical Sermons

After arguing for the importance of Bible characters in terms of God's Word and the legitimacy of imitating Bible characters, in this final section, I would like to argue for the legitimacy of preaching biographical sermons. In order to build up the biblical/theological framework of this issue, I will explicate this section through the following three aspects: first, the Bible itself is an example of "preaching Bible characters"; second, biographical preaching is in line with the purpose of the Bible; third, preaching biographical sermons is very effective in spiritual edification.

First, the Bible itself gives us the evidence and example that God spoke of many Bible characters to the original hearers. In past years, preachers were inclined to preach doctrine, dogma and creed in the sermon forms of intellectual, analytical and Aristotelian logic. As Greidanus says, "Many sermons in the past tended to be strictly didactic, feeding the congregation a diet of propositional truth."²³ In the meantime, people treated Bible characters and such stories disparagingly "merely as bedtime tales to read to our children or as Sunday school illustration from which to draw morals for

²³ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 18-19.

good behavior.”²⁴ However, such was not the case in biblical times. God intended the Israelites to learn serious lessons by hearing a great deal of stories.

During biblical time, we can assume that people did not have the opportunity to read the Bible like as we do. People would not have this privilege until the printing technique was invented in the 15th Century. Indeed, people could only “hear” the Bible instead of reading it. Bar-Efrat points out this fact as well: “It is believed that a great deal of this (biblical) literature was originally oral and was intended for the ear rather than the eye.”²⁵ Old Testament Israelites and New Testament Christians alike learned God’s truth from hearing. The examples are as follows: When Moses was inspired to write down God’s Word, he repeatedly urged Israel to “hear” God’s Word: “*Hear* now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you” (Deut 4:1); “*Hear*, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you . . .” (Deut 6:3); “Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi . . . and to all the elders of Israel. Then Moses commanded them . . . You shall *read* this law before them in their *hearing*” (Deut 31:9-11).

During the times of King Josiah of Judah, “Hilkiah the high priest . . . found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord.” The king called “the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. He *read* in their *hearing* all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the temple of the Lord” (2 Kgs 22:8; 23:1-3). Later on Israel was defeated, exiled and returned to Canaan. After rebuilding the wall, Ezra the scribe

²⁴ Quoting from the foreword of Haddon Robinson pointing out how biblical stories are mistreated by people in the book: Edwards, *Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching*, 9.

²⁵ Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 200.

brought the Law before the assembly of all the people and “*read* it aloud” from day-break till noon . . . and all the people *listened* attentively to the Book of the Law” (Neh 8:2-3).

In the New Testament, we see that Jesus went to the synagogue at Nazareth as was his custom on the Sabbath. “And he stood up to *read*. . . Then he rolled up the scroll . . .” and he said to the people: “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your *hearing*” (Lk 4:16-21). Jesus often urged people to listen carefully by saying: “He who has ears to *hear*, let him *hear*” (Mk 4:9; Mt 11:15). After Jesus’ resurrection the Apostle Paul was converted miraculously by God’s grace. He wrote many letters to new-founded churches for edification purpose – such letters became part of the inspired Word. At the end of one letter, he reminded them: “After this letter has been *read* to you, see that it is also *read* in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn *read* the letter from Laodicea” (Col 4:16). Inasmuch as people could only hear God’s Word when someone read it out in public, in those days, the reading of Holy Scripture carried as much weight as sermons today. There is little left to wonder why the Apostle Paul instructed Timothy to “devote yourself to the public *reading* of Scripture” first, then to preach and teach (1 Tim 4:13). And when we come to the last book of God’s Word (Revelation), we here echoes of the key words: “Blessed is the one who *reads* the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who *hear* it and take to heart what is written in it. . . .” (Rev 1:3). This indicates that one man read the book in public and many listened. The frequently used term “he who has a ear, let him *hear*” repeats right after the letters to seven churches respectively in Chapter 2-3. Thus, all believers in the old days perceived God’s Word through hearing. No wonder H. Van Dyke Parunak reminds us that biblical literature,

completely different from modern literature, is “essentially aural” that is, “it was intended to be understood with the ear, and not with the eye.”²⁶

Moreover, we also know that narrative is the largest genre in the Holy Book. Arthurs states, “By my estimate, it makes up more than 60 percent of Holy Scripture.”²⁷ Thus 60% of what the ancients heard was narrative — Bible characters and their stories. Believers heard many stories of heroes and heroines including such subjects as the patriarchs, judges, Ruth, King David, Esther and Daniel. Indeed, the author of Hebrew exemplifies the fruit of “hearing” Scripture (i.e. the ability to remember so many faith heroes and their stories). The author even stated that he did not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets (Heb 11:32). He assumed that the Jewish readers were familiar with those heroic narratives because they would have already heard those stories read repeatedly in public (which can be seen as opportunities where God “preached” to the people). Therefore, the Bible itself sets a good example that God spoke of many Bible characters to original hearers. If God “preached” so many “Bible characters’ stories” to the original audience and intended them to know and learn from those stories, it is legitimate for today’s preacher to become God’s mouth and lips to preach biographical sermons to contemporary audience.

In the following analysis, I will argue that biographical preaching is in line with the purpose of the Bible. Since Bible characters are mentioned in historical texts in the Old Testament, there was a dispute among Reformed theologians about the purpose of

²⁶ H. Van Dyke Parunak, “Some Axioms for Literary Architecture,” *Sem* 8 (1982) 2, quoted in Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 60.

²⁷ Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 64.

those historical texts. Some, such as Holwerda, Schilder, asserted that the historical texts (when used as preaching text) can only be interpreted in accord with its own nature as redemptive-history, and the characters mentioned in this text cannot be viewed as good examples to be imitated or warning examples to be avoided.²⁸ Holwerda says,

The Bible does not contain many histories but *one* history – the one history of God’s constantly advancing revelation, the one history of God’s every progressing redemptive work. . . . We must . . . understand all the accounts in their relation with each other, in their coherence with the center of redemptive history, Jesus Christ.²⁹

Indeed, some theologians only focus on Christ and God’s progressive redemptive history. Holwerda continues to state that others, such as Douma, Huyser, not only consent to the importance of redemptive history but also contend that they are free to treat Bible characters and their experiences described in the text as good or bad examples. Thus, their focus is not only on God and His redemptive plan, but also on the stories of men and women (heroes and heroines) (I will discuss this issue further under the sub-title: “the nature of the historical text” in the next chapter). Without doubt the Bible has a unified theme—God’s redemptive plan with Christ as its center (Lk 24:27). However, the purpose of the Bible is, on the one hand, for people to know and to receive the salvation (2 Tim 3:15), and on the other hand, for building up believers in spiritual maturity (2 Tim 3:16-17). Indeed, the purpose of the Bible includes both God’s grand plan of salvation and meaningful daily life lessons for spiritual edification. Fee and Stuart set forth a very helpful explanation for understanding and applying narrative: the

²⁸ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 56-58, 121-124.

²⁹ B. Holwerda, “Hoe Lezen we de Heilige Geschiedenis?” in *Gereformeerd Mannenblad*, XVIII (1940), 27, quoted in Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 41.

“three levels of narrative.”³⁰ The diagram of these “three levels of narrative” can be illustrated as follows:

Level 3: God’s redemptive plan — the initial creation, the fall of humanity, the ubiquity of sin, the need of redemption, the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ.
Level 2: God’s redeeming work for the covenant people. For example, the story of Israel from the calling of Abraham, the patriarchs, Exodus, the establishment of the nation of Israel, till the destruction of Israel and Judah, and the restoration after the exile.
Level 1: All individual narratives in the Bible. For example, the narrative(s) of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Ruth, Gideon, David.

Table 2. Fee and Stuart’s Three Levels of Narrative

Fee and Stuart contend that we may understand the narrative from three levels: God’s grand plan of salvation belongs to the top level which is the most important one; the second level centers on how God deals with Israel as chosen people; all individual stories comprise the base level. For example, when we study the life of Moses, we may center on any or all of these three levels. At the top level, the fact that God uses Moses to lead Israelite to leave Egypt toward Canaan is part of God’s plan of redeeming the world. Exodus is an important stage of the history of God’s salvation, which eventually brings to us the Messiah. At the middle level, Moses is the leader of Israel during the time of Exodus, which leads to the covenant God made with them and the establishment of the nation of Israel in Canaan. At the bottom level, we may deal with Moses’ sibling struggle, his leadership during the time of Exodus, and his loyalty to God. All these are lessons Moses learns from God. God communicates His message through these three levels (all of which are interrelated with each other). Therefore, it is legitimate to preach the first level (individual stories) as long as we keep Fee and Stuart’s words in mind: “It

³⁰ Fee & Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 91.

is especially important that you always be asking yourself how these first-level narratives fit into the second and third levels of the biblical story.”³¹

In summary, perceiving the purpose of the Bible both for bringing people to Christ and growing in Christ, we have vantage not only to understand, receive and proclaim God’s salvation but also to treasure, study and preach those characters in individual stories. Such stories provide us with endless spiritual lessons toward the goal of becoming mature in Christ!

In the last aspect I would like to argue for the effectiveness of biographical preaching in spiritual edification. When we preach the Bible character, we preach the person’s story, including his or her struggle, problem, relation with God and men, victory and failure. Since the content and form is story, the effectiveness is inherent in the genre of narrative. The form of story attracts both children and adults. It goes without saying that children enjoy bedtime stories. Adults also enjoy stories, as evidenced by high television viewership rates in North America. In Canada, the average Canadian adult watched almost 1500 hours of television in 2008 (according to the research by Digital Home Canada);³² this figure is rising rapidly, as the average was 1180 hours (22.7 hours per week) in 1997 (Nielsen Media Research).³³ Americans watch even more hours of television. According to the quarterly report of A. C. Nielsen Co. in

³¹ Fee & Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 91.

³² Digital Home Canada, “Average Canadian watches over 25,000 TV commercials annually,” Digital Home, <http://www.digitalhome.ca/2009/10/average-canadian-watches-over-25000-tv-commercials-annually/> (accessed December 5, 2010).

³³ The Culture Statistics Program Television Project, “Statistics on TV Viewing Habits (1994-2000),” Media Awareness Network, http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/research_documents/statistics/television/tv_viewing_habits.cfm (accessed December 5, 2010).

May 2009: average American spends 153 hours per month watching Television, amounting to 1836 hours yearly which is more than ever before.³⁴ Edwards considered this kind of phenomena and asks: “Why are we drawn to all of these screens? Why do we spend so much of our time under their influence? . . . it is because of the stories. Television sells stories. . . . We live in a story-saturated society.”³⁵ Arthurs consents,

Everyone loves a story. . . . Anthropologists, sociologists, rhetoricians, theologians, psychologists, philosophers, literary critics, and others all seem to be say the same thing: “Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. . . . [N]arrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.”³⁶

No wonder people like stories! However, is there any evidence that people like Bible characters and their stories too?

Indeed, we have some sound evidences from some of the most successful preachers of Bible biography. In his book first printed in 1941, Macartney said: “Early in my first pastorate, at the First Presbyterian Church, Paterson, New Jersey, I made the important homiletic discovery that the people like to hear sermons on Bible characters.”³⁷ In the foreword of his other book, *The Wisest Fool And Other Men of the Bible*, he affirms: “I discovered early in my ministry that people like biography; and nowhere is there such biography, so stirring, so moving, so uplifting, so tragic, as that to be found in the Bible.” Whitesell advocates as well: “Sermons on Bible character are

³⁴ Three Screen Report, “Americans Watching More TV Than Ever; Web and Mobile Video up too,” Nielsen Wire, http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/americans-watching-more-tv-than-ever/ (accessed December 5, 2010).

³⁵ Edwards, *Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching*, 14.

³⁶ Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 62-63.

³⁷ Clarence E. Macartney, *The Greatest Men of The Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 5.

more likely to appeal to the people than any other type of Bible preaching. . . . The way for the preacher to capture this modern interest in people is to preach on the people of the Bible.”³⁸ Even the contemporary expositor and preacher Wiersbe contends: “If it is done correctly, biographical preaching is especially effective because it combines story, practical psychology, and biblical theology, all wrapped up in the lives of real people.”³⁹ As we see that biographical preaching has the power to hold people’s attention, we can look back and understand why God chose the genre of narrative to convey His message. After affirming that the largest genre of the Bible is narrative, Arthurs stresses, “Apparently, God values story as a form of communication.”⁴⁰

From the research above we can see that the genre of narrative attracts people. Another reason why biographical preaching is effective is that the narrative literature carries the inherent function of “characterization.” The authors use different ways to mold the Bible personages, such as dialogue, action, and physical description. What is the purpose and function of characterization? Pratt says: “Exploring characterization often helps us understand the basic drama of a text.” Furthermore he contends: “Investigating characterization also lend insight into the kinds of reactions Old Testament writers expected from their readers. . . . characters were designed to elicit three main types of reactions: sympathetic, antipathetic, and mixed.” In his conclusion of the topic of characters he says: “We can also gain an understanding of how the writers wanted readers to respond to their texts. In these ways characters form a vital

³⁸ Faris Daniel Whitesell, *Preaching on Bible Characters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955), 14.

³⁹ Wiersbe, *Bible Personalities*, 11.

⁴⁰ Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 64.

dimension for the original meaning of Old Testament stories.”⁴¹ Thus people will understand more about the text as we clearly interpret the character in preaching biographical sermon. In the meantime, people will be inclined to react in tune with the attitude of the protagonist (as the author intended). Arthurs gives a direct and pointed statement:

The primary rhetorical function of character is identification. . . . Storytellers induce empathy with heroes or antipathy with villains. . . . When our minds are engaged in the flow of the plot and our feelings are bound to the characters, the values of the story begin to infiltrate our hearts. . . . when someone begins, “Once upon a time,” we relax and yield to the form of the genre. The ideas expressed in that form enter the heart with little interrogation.⁴²

By using many personages and stories, the Bible causes us to yield to God’s values and ideas. All these evidences speak for the effectiveness of biographical preaching in spiritual edification. Its effectiveness is owed to its inherent nature as narrative and the function of characterization.

Conclusion

In summary, I have established the biblical/theological framework for my thesis. I have made it evident in three aspects: Bible characters play an important role in God’s revelation; it is legitimate to use the Bible characters as examples or models for imitation; it is legitimate to preach biographical sermons in the light of the genre. Based on all the aforementioned evidences we explored, biographical preaching is, indeed, legitimate and effective in nourishing God’s people. After establishing this framework, I will provide a literature review in the next chapter.

⁴¹ Pratt, Jr., *He Gave Us Stories*, 147, 149.

⁴² Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 76.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter Two, I established the biblical/theological framework for this thesis project. I will now set forth the literature review concerning biographical preaching. Preaching biographical sermons is not only a technical issue of homiletics, but also a disputable issue of hermeneutics. However, one can solve both the hermeneutical and homiletical issues by understanding the characteristics of the genre of narrative. Therefore, I focus this literature review on two areas. The first area I probe is the dispute over biographical preaching (sometimes called the “exemplary approach”). In the second area, I explore how the interpretation from genre’s perspective will release the contemptuous concerns about exemplary approach, leading to a biblical framework for biographical preaching.

The Key Issues of the Dispute over Biographical Preaching

David Larsen wrote a chapter (“The Exquisite Vignettes of Bible Biography”) in his book *Telling the Old, Old Story* (1995) to explicate and advocate biographical preaching. Larsen admits the potential problem of biographical preaching: “Preaching in the tradition of the Enlightenment is anthropocentric; preaching in the tradition of the Reformers is theocentric and christocentric. Our evident peril in preaching Bible biography is that we lapse into anthropocentric preaching, becoming overly psychologistic and moralistic.”¹ He also pointed out that Greidanus was the one who has

¹ David Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story: The Art of Narrative Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), 194.

most confronted this issue: “No one has more forcefully and helpfully kept our feet to the fire on this issue than Sidney Greidanus.”² Indeed, Greidanus introduces the history of the Dutch “exemplary—redemptive-historical controversy” (between 1930 and 1942) in his 1970 work, *Sola Scripture: Problems and Principles In Preaching Historical Texts*. Greidanus also states the reasons why the redemptive side objected to exemplary preaching (termed “biographical preaching” in the English speaking world) from both hermeneutical and homiletical concerns. Although he does not completely agree with the redemptive-historical side, Greidanus still stands with the redemptive-historical approach, upholding Christ but objecting to biographical preaching. Later, in *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (1988), Greidanus continually objected to those who preached biographical sermons, by criticizing their improper ways of bridging the historical and cultural gap when they preached a relevant message from the historical text. When he wrote *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (1999), Greidanus continued to accuse biographical preaching of its human-centered message, and states the reasons of his objection as follows:

The problems of this kind of preaching are evident in the attempt at application: generalizing, spiritualizing, and moralizing. But these problems in application are only indicative of underlying problems, problems in hermeneutical approach and exposition. For it is evident that biographical preaching does not interpret each story in the context of the one underlying story of the coming kingdom of God. Instead, it tends to isolate each story from its redemptive-historical and literary context. Biographical preaching also fails to inquire after the intention of the author . . . equates biblical characters with the people in the pew and then inquires how we ought to imitate or learn from their examples. Because biographical preaching short-changes the contexts of the biblical story and the biblical author’s intention, it is unable to produce genuine Christ-centered sermon.³

² Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story*, 194.

³ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 36.

Greidanus' objection to biographical preaching could be summarized in four issues:

1. Biographical preaching is not in line with the nature (or the author's intent) of the historical (narrative) texts.
2. It is illegitimate to imitate Bible characters in biographical preaching. .
3. Biographical preaching does not communicate God-centered messages.
4. Biographical preaching does not bridge the historical gap properly.

Although Greidanus and other theologians of the "redemptive side" set forth reasons to oppose the "exemplary side," other scholars (and Bible teachers who favor biographical preaching) do not agree. In the following section, I provide literature reviews on these four issues.

The Literature Review of the Four Issues of Biographical Preaching

Issue 1: Is Biographical Preaching in Line with the Nature (or Authorial Intent) of the Historical (Narrative) Texts?

The nature of the Bible is intertwined with the intentions of texts as Stendahl maintains: "the normative nature of the Bible requires . . . a serious attention to original intentions of the texts."⁴ One of the fundamental disputes over biographical preaching is: "How should one view the nature of historical texts?" In *Sola Scriptura*, Greidanus states that the exemplary side upholds that "the preachers, in preaching historical texts,

⁴ Stendahl, *JBL* 103/1(1984) 9-10, quoted in Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 109.

would display the persons mentioned in the texts as models to be imitated, as examples to be followed – hence the term ‘exemplary preaching.’”⁵ Using Huyser, Greidanus also traces why preachers use stories for purposes of illustration: “Everything recorded in Scripture about persons and other matters is indisputable truth, profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”⁶ The exemplary side also agrees with Grosheide’s rule for historical texts:

One can first investigate the meaning of a certain part of redemptive history within the totality of revelation. Here it is especially the Christocentric that comes up for discussion After this one must, in the second place, also take every complete history, every unit, large or small, in and by itself. Apart from its place in and its meaning for the totality of divine revelation, it proclaims something to us One can ask, which virtue is praised here, which sin is punished.⁷

In Greidanus’s eyes, the exemplary style views that the purpose of biblical stories is to exemplify certain “truths”: a dogmatic “truth” which must be believed, or an ethical “truth” which must be lived.⁸ In support of the redemptive-historical side, Holwerda objects to this idea and maintains that the specific purpose or the primacy of historical texts is not exemplification; indeed, Holwerda views the historical text as a *fact* of history and not (for example) as a parable.⁹ Schilder also maintains that the historical text is intended to show this advent of God, and “when God tells us something about *his* work, *his* coming to the world in Christ (from the beginning to the end), then

⁵ Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 8.

⁶ Huyser, *Het Exempel in de Prediking*, 177, quoted in Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 57.

⁷ Grosheide, *Hermeneutiek*, 193, quoted in Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 45.

⁸ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 58.

⁹ Holwerda, *Begonnen*, 88, 87, quoted in Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 58, 61.

we ought to speak about that and nothing else.”¹⁰ Understood in this way, there is little wonder that Douma calls the redemptive side’s way of interpretation as the “exclusive redemptive-historical method.”¹¹ Moreover, Schilder contends that the central thrust of the historical texts is the progressive redemptive history of Christ.¹² Greidanus agrees by saying: “The sermon must be a proclamation of the content of the preaching-text and must do justice to the intent of that text. The historical text itself does not moralize and hence should not be used for moralizing. The purpose of historical text is not to offer us human models for proper conduct but to show the progressive coming of *Christ* in history.”¹³ Indeed, supporters of the redemptive-historical side insist that the historical text must be treated as progressing redemptive *history* – God’s coming to the world in Christ. They argue that one cannot use history to illustrate (exemplify) dogmatic or ethical truths.¹⁴ However, Greidanus points out that those supporters put too much weight on “unwarrantable identification of historical texts and historical facts” and “can hardly be preached in a relevant manner.”¹⁵ Understanding both the redemptive-historical approach’s lack of relevancy and the weakness of the traditional exemplary approach, Greidanus contends: “The nature of the historical text can best be described, therefore, as proclamation, kerygma.”¹⁶ Greidanus still admits that redemptive history is

¹⁰ Schilder, *De Reformatie*, XI, 373, quoted in Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 146.

¹¹ Douma, *De Heraut*, No. 3337, quoted in Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 45.

¹² Schilder, *De Reformatie*, XVIII, 336, quoted in Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 149.

¹³ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 151.

¹⁴ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 133.

¹⁵ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 211-212.

¹⁶ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 212.

the very foundation of historical texts; however, he views historical texts as literary compositions and must be interpreted as such: the proclamation of God's redemptive acts for man at various stages of history.¹⁷

In the preface of his book, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (1999), Greidanus admits: "Since the late 1960s, biblical scholars have been exploring the Bible using exciting new methods such as rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism, and canonical criticism. They have been, and still are, gaining many new insights into the meaning of biblical texts." Indeed, there are many important insights and helpful suggestions one can distill from the study of the narrative genre. Through this new perspective, the foregoing problem can be solved.

The well-known scholar Robert Alter wrote *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981) through the eyes of a literary critic. In this book, Alter leads people to perceive that the techniques of literature are important tools for interpreting the narrative genre. He states, "I would prefer to insist on a complete interfusion of literary art with theological, moral, or historiosophical vision, the fullest perception of the latter dependent on the fullest grasp of the former."¹⁸ Alter continues,

In any case, the fact that the text is ancient and that its characteristic narrative procedures may differ in many respects from those of modern texts Attention to the ancient narrative's consciousness of its own operations, Todorov proposes, . . . What we need to understand better is that the religious vision of the Bible is given depth and subtlety precisely by being conveyed through the most sophisticated resources of prose fiction.¹⁹

¹⁷ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 213-215, 219.

¹⁸ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 19.

¹⁹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 21-22.

In the mean time, Alter also reminds us that scholars have a tendency to study somewhat “essential” topics (such as biblical eschatology), but neglect the study of character, motive, and narrative design. Furthermore, he states: “The implicit theology of the Hebrew Bible dictates a complex moral and psychological realism in biblical narrative because God’s purposes are always entrained in history, dependent on the acts of individual men and women for their continuing realization.”²⁰ Alter’s study suggests that, if one desires to understand the historical text, he/she must not neglect the characteristics of the genre of narrative, the characterization of the personages and their relation with God and others. Ryken also reminds us, in *Words of Delight* (1992), not to treat the historical text as mere history, but to see it as a wealth of human story as well. After explaining the story of Ruth in connection to the salvation history and messianic line, Ryken continues,

A main purpose of heroic narrative is to suggest a sense of reality and values. . . what is right and wrong, valuable and worthless. . . The story of Ruth . . . celebrates the commonplace—nature, harvest, family, home, earth. . . celebrates domestic values. . . an image of fulfilled womanhood. . . a celebration of the ideal of wedded romantic love.

The story of Ruth is a richly human story. The very complexity and artistry of the story resist the attempts I have seen to reduce the story to no more than a collection of historical fact or a theological platitude. I cringe every time I read a theologian’s comment that “when the narrative ‘trimming’ is stripped away, the story of Ruth takes its place as simply one more bit of *Heilsgeschichte* [Holy history], for it serves to trace the background of the great David.” Against such reductionism I offer the statement of a literary critic who holds up “a picture of the author of Ruth as an artist in full command of a complex and subtle art, which art is exhibited in almost every word of the story” (Rauben, p. 176) Heroic narrative exists to do justice to the humanity of our experience in the world, and this true also of the religious hero stories that we find in the Bible.²¹

²⁰ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 12.

²¹ Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 124-125.

Facing the debate of the nature of the historical texts, Fee and Stuart's "three levels of narrative" (in *How to Read the Bible with All Its Worth* (1981)) also brings an antidote to the argument. Although I have explained Fee and Stuart's idea in Chapter Two, I will summarize their key points. Fee and Stuart contend that the Old Testament narrative can be understood on three levels. The top ("third") level is God's redemptive plan (metanarrative), which speaks about the creation of God, fall and sin of man, Christ's incarnation, sacrifice (i.e., the whole story of God's redemption). The second level is about the story of God's redeeming people (i.e. "Israelites") in the Old Testament. This level includes the chosen patriarchs, the experience of Israel becoming a country, Israel's disloyalty to God, God's patience and grace, ultimate destruction, and restoration of the temple after the Israelites returned from Babylon. The bottom ("first") level includes many individual stories on which the other two levels are built, such as the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Ruth.²² Fee and Stuart's wisdom helps readers of the Old Testament perceive the legitimacy of studying the historical text from any of the aforementioned levels. However, they also give valuable reminders: "But it is especially important that you always be asking yourself how these first-level narratives fit into the second and third levels of the biblical story."²³

Arthurs provides a definition of biblical narrative in *Preaching with Variety* (2007): "[B]iblical narrative can be defined as a historically accurate, artistically sophisticated account of persons and actions in a setting designed to reveal God and

²² Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 91.

²³ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 91.

edify the reader.”²⁴ With this definition, the question of “How can one view the nature of the historical text?” can be solved. This definition, from the perspective of genre, offers an overall outlook on the nature of historical (narrative) text, encompassing such elements as the following: historicity stance, edifying purpose, genre sensitivity, character of God and people, and relevant message. Regarding the thorny hermeneutical and homiletical issue of preaching moral principles from the historical texts, Arthurs (in the same book) also gives a pertinent statement: “I see both approaches—historical-redemptive interpretation and moral exhortation—as being legitimate when preaching from the stories of the Hebrew Bible.”²⁵ Arthurs’ assertion is based on how Jesus and the apostles use the Old Testament, and Fee and Stuart’s interpretation of “three levels of narrative.” He also gives sound advice: “Moral principles must be urged, but as a result of God’s powerful, faithful, and gracious provision. . . . Moralistic preaching without theological grounding feels like nagging with its never ending ‘do more, do better.’ . . . a vision of God stirs holy affections, which is the seat of volition, and forms a profoundly Christian worldview.”²⁶ Therefore, careful biographical preaching (involving preaching Christ and His redemptive plan as well as biblical characters and moral principles) is able to communicate God’s truth according to the author’s intent. Understood in this way, biographical preaching is in line with the nature (or the author’s intent) of the historical narrative texts.

²⁴ Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 64.

²⁵ Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 67.

²⁶ Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 67-68.

Issue 2: Is It Legitimate to Imitate Bible Characters in Biographical Preaching?

The following statement, from Greidanus's *Sola Scriptura*, clearly explains the fundamental stance of exemplary preaching:

I Clement, says Bultmann, generally uses the O.T. as a "book of ethical model," or, in Koole's words, as a "picture gallery." Good examples are the patriarchs, Lot, Moses, Job, Rahab, David, Eliajah, Elisha, and Ezekiel. All these are worthy of imitation. In addition to these good examples, the O.T. also contains many bad examples – e.g., Cain, the wife of Lot, Esau – whose actions must be shunned.²⁷

In *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (1988), Greidanus lists several reasons to object to the "imitation of Bible character." Firstly, biblical characters are not presented as ideal persons, but sinful men; secondly, it is difficult for one to judge the "goodness" or "badness" of a character's actions; thirdly, exemplary-approach advocates tend to ignore the historical and cultural gap, and literary context; and fourthly, the exemplary-approach is anthropocentric.²⁸ Noth expresses his objection as well,

A legitimate "re-presentation" cannot use the individual human figures of biblical history as its subjects, either as ethical "models," which they in fact never are, or as exemplary "heroes of faith" since in the biblical narratives they are never so presented, or as representatives of true humanity whose experiences . . . are to be imitated.²⁹

However, along with the increasing understanding of literature forms and techniques, there is a light shining upon this dilemma. Ryken does not agree with these theologians and contends, in *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (1984), that the largest

²⁷ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 9.

²⁸ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 161-163.

²⁹ Martin Noth, "Representation of the OT in Proclamation," Trans. James Luther Mays, in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, 86, quoted in Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and Ancient Text*, 163.

branch of narrative is heroic narrative. In the heroic narrative, the life and experience of the protagonist is the center on which the hero story is built.³⁰ Ryken also points out that “the true hero expresses an accepted social and moral norm.”³¹ He continues,

A literary hero or heroine is representative. . . . they . . . capture the universal human situation. . . . The hero stories of the Bible do more than set the historical record straight. They are also models or paradigms of the religious experience of the human race. . . . Characters like Joseph and Ruth . . . merge with our own experiences as we begin to “build bridges” between their stories and our own.³²

He goes on to state,

Usually, such representative heroes are exemplary of some ideal, though they need not be wholly good They give us a memorable gallery of moral and spiritual models to emulate. . . . stories can also inculcate a positive ideal by negative example. They can indirectly encourage good behaviour The value or virtues that are inculcated by a hero story like that of Joseph or Ruth are embodied in the protagonist’s character and life. . . . A story conveys truth whenever we can say, “That is the way life is.” . . . Hero stories focus on the struggles and triumphs of the protagonist. The central hero or heroine is representative of a whole group and is usually a largely exemplary character.³³

Ryken also gives an illustration of how the Bible author chose and arranged the material to present the emergence of a hero. He takes David as an example. In 1 and 2 Samuel, the writer proves David to be a hero by choosing positive material. After the incident of Bathsheba and Uriah, David’s great sin causes his life to turn into misery through the negative information the author provides.³⁴ Ryken points out that, in 1 Chronicles alone, there are six chapters describing how David attempted to build the temple, and seven chapters written about the hero’s military victory. In conclusion,

³⁰ Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 75.

³¹ Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 75.

³² Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 76.

³³ Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 76-78.

³⁴ Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 63.

Ryken states: “We hear nothing, however, about the Bathsheba/Uriah episode. This selectivity gives us a heroic interpretation of David’s life, with emphasis on his piety and courage and national accomplishments.”³⁵

Larsen does not agree with Greidanus either. In *Telling the Old, Old Story*, he openly challenges Greidanus by demonstrating examples in Scripture, such as the following: Jesus uses Elijah and Elisha as illustrations of the principle that a prophet is without honour in his own country; the writer of Hebrews uses Old Testament figures as examples of faith; Balaam is a negative example to both Peter and Jude.³⁶ Larsen also says: “The issue of Scripture as model is difficult, but if some err in too quickly and broadly asserting the existence of models, isn’t Greidanus going too far to the other extreme?”³⁷ On the other hand, he contends: “We can identify with biblical characters at many points, because in many cases the Scripture instructs us to do so (see 1 Cor 11:1; Heb 13:7; etc.).”³⁸ Both Scripture examples and genre sensitivity give us confidence that it is legitimate to imitate Bible characters with careful exegesis of the text as narrative.

Issue 3: Does Biographical Preaching Communicate a God-Centered Message?

Advocates of the redemptive-historical approach accuse biographical preaching as “anthropocentric.” However, “God-centered preaching” has never been an issue for the exemplary side. Domma, a Dutch theologian on the exemplary side, says,

³⁵ Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 63-64.

³⁶ Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story*, 195.

³⁷ Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story*, 195.

³⁸ Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story*, 195.

Our fathers knew very well that redemptive history is a unified structure with Christ at its center, but they still felt free to treat separately (using biblical givens) certain persons described in Scripture, to picture them psychologically, to speak of their struggles and trials, their strengths and weaknesses, and then to draw parallels between the experiences of the Bible saints and the struggles of believers today. Without any hesitation our fathers held up the virtues of the biblical persons as an example to all, but also their sins and weaknesses as a warning.³⁹

Greidanus notes, in *Sola Scriptura*, the focal point of dispute on this issue: the exemplary side contends that they may draw two lines from the historical text: one line to the believers today (the exemplary line) and another one to Christ (the Christocentric line). The redemptive-historical side proclaims “Christ only” and rejects this kind of “dualism” in the exemplary approach.⁴⁰ Holwerda is the first one who called the approach he stands for “the Christocentric method.”⁴¹ He does not accept Domma’s idea and considers the exemplary approach would eventually make the Bible characters central at the expense of Christ. Schilder’s trilogy of 1930 makes their stance prominent that “Christ is always the only one around whom, from whom, and to whom everything moves.”⁴² In his view, Christ is not only the center but also the eternal Logos, who appears both in his incarnation, and in the entire works throughout history. By virtue of this, Christocentric preaching is theocentric preaching: focusing on the progressive redemptive history of Christ and Christ in his coming.⁴³

³⁹ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 43.

⁴⁰ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 67.

⁴¹ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 68.

⁴² Schilder, *Christus in Zijn Lijden*, I, 157, quoted in Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 68.

⁴³ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 145-146, 171.

Greidanus upholds the God-centered perspective too; however, what he stresses about the historical text is not the past facts of history, but God's acts in history (in a more relevant manner). He explains in *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*: "As religious literature, the Bible reveals its theocentric nature. Everything is viewed in relationship to God . . . the sovereignty of God is pivotal in biblical thinking."⁴⁴ Regarding the Bible character, he takes a step admitting that the representative function of certain biblical characters exists.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, he still refuses to take them as good or bad examples, he says: "They (the preachers) ought to employ biblical characters the way the Bible employs them, not as ethical models, not as heroes for emulation or examples for warning, but as people whose story has been taken up into the Bible in order to reveal what God is doing for and through them."⁴⁶

Chapell affirms in *Christ-Centered Preaching*, that the human race is composed of fallen creatures in a fallen world (Fallen Condition Focus, FCF) that requires God's salvation and sanctification.⁴⁷ He also upholds that Christ is central by saying that "[N]o aspect of revelation can be thoroughly understood or explained in isolation from some aspect of Christ's redeeming work."⁴⁸ Furthermore, he focuses on God's grace which ultimately leads people to salvation provided by Christ.⁴⁹ Based on this perception,

⁴⁴ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 114.

⁴⁵ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 179.

⁴⁶ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 118.

⁴⁷ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 48-52.

⁴⁸ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 276.

⁴⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 279.

however, Chapell brings a new light and a balanced perspective on viewing the biblical characters as examples:

To be faithful to Scripture, we must not shy away from passages that encourage us to use people in the Bible as examples (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:1; Heb. 11:39). Still . . . we must be sure to identify the source of the character quality that Scripture commends. Since the source of any holy trait is God's grace, . . . The commendable aspects of biblical characters function in Scripture like aspects of God's law. They are necessary to know, proper to follow, . . . Preachers should teach God's people to esteem and emulate the righteous actions of godly people in the Bible, but . . . such godliness can come only as a response to God's unconditional love and as a result of his enabling Spirit (Phil. 1: 19-21). Sermons that preach imitation of saints in isolation from the Savior profit nothing (see John 15:5; Eph. 3:16-19). Without the provision of his grace, we cannot be people he desires.⁵⁰

He continues,

All biblical standards (whether presented in the form of written precept or human example) will function as God intends – guiding God's people into the paths that reflect his glory, promote their good, and satisfy their souls as the natural outflow of loving thankfulness for what he has done on their behalf and what he alone can further do.⁵¹

Chapell summarizes, “ Successful (i.e., biblical) Christ-centered preaching bears the marks of grace-motivated obedience—insisting on the contemporary application of biblical mandates while grounding the source of Christian behaviour in appreciation of God's glory and provision.”⁵²

Obviously, Chapell positively views the Bible characters as examples to imitate, as long as the means and motives of “life-changing” are based on the grace of God; then, this approach would be viewed as Christ-centered preaching.

⁵⁰ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 290-291.

⁵¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 305.

⁵² Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 313.

Understood in this way, there is a just viewpoint to examine biographical preaching. Overstreet states in *Biographical Preaching*:

In considering narrative literature from which to deliver the biographical sermon. . . the sermon's emphasis should not be based merely upon history but rather upon God in history. . . He operates according to principles that are consistent with His character. The sermon's focus will, therefore, be upon those timeless principles.⁵³

He also says, "When we examine the lives of Bible characters, we see that they were not perfect, that they had problems with each other . . . they manifested a true Christian love toward each other."⁵⁴ Overstreet stresses that "the ultimate value in preaching biographical messages is the spiritual challenge and instruction that they give to our listeners." By supporting his assertion, he quotes the statement of Hayslip as follows: "Perhaps the greatest value of biographical preaching is that it gives you an opportunity to vividly show how the transforming grace of God performs miracles in human personality. This kind of preaching points out the possibilities of sainthood in every Magdalene."⁵⁵

After examining what Overstreet claims, it is apparent that his assertion encompasses all the critical issues of biographical preaching (i.e. God-centered, genre-concerned, timeless truth, and the motives and means of transforming life coming from grace of God), and his main concerns are in line with the requirements Chapell makes. Arguing for biographical preaching being God-centered preaching, on the one hand, Larsen bluntly shows his disagreement with Greidanus: "I regret that he (Greidanus)

⁵³ R. Larry Overstreet, *Biographical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 37.

⁵⁴ Overstreet, *Biographical Preaching*, 54.

⁵⁵ Ross W. Hayslip, "Preaching Great Bible Characters," in *Biblical Preaching for Contemporary Man*, 90, quoted in Overstreet, *Biographical Praching*, 69.

puts Charles W. Koller, Lloyd Perry, and Faris Whitesell into the category of “anthropocentric preaching.”⁵⁶ On the other hand, he says, “It is quite clear that one can preach any of the literary genres anthropocentrically. One can psychologise the epistles and moralize the gospel accounts.”⁵⁷ Larsen advocates biographical preaching, and urges readers to pay attention to original hearers’ perception, author’s intention, God’s work in people’s lives and identifying God-centered motives in the text.⁵⁸ In *Bible Personalities* (2005), Wiersbe promotes biographical preaching and asserts that “the main message of the Bible is the grace of God as seen in Jesus Christ, the good news that Jesus can change people and make them new creatures.”⁵⁹ Not only does he teach us to understand the Bible character’s heart, mind, and circumstances, but also reminds us that “the key question is, How did God work in and through this person to accomplish his will and glorify his name? (see Jn 17: 4)”⁶⁰ Moreover, Wiersbe gives us a concrete example: “Instead of merely tracing a person’s life, we might focus on the crises in his or her life or the lessons learned from the Lord. Jonah learned the lesson of God’s presence (chap. 1), God’s pardon (chap. 2), God’s power (chap. 3), and God’s pity (chap. 4).”⁶¹ Overstreet, Larsen and Wiersbe all carefully do justice to the text in preparing biographical sermons. By virtue of this way of handling the text, biographical preaching communicates a God-centered message.

⁵⁶ Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story*, 195.

⁵⁷ Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story*, 195-196.

⁵⁸ Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story*, 196.

⁵⁹ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Personalities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 10.

⁶⁰ Wiersbe, *Bible Personalities*, 22.

⁶¹ Wiersbe, *Bible Personalities*, 26.

Issue 4: Does Biographical Preaching Properly Bridge the Historical Gap?

There are two arguments about bridging the historical texts. One is that biographical preaching is atomistic interpretation; another is that it is illegitimate to identify common people with Bible characters in biographical preaching. First, I will explore the literature review of the former, then the latter.

In the traditional biographical preaching, sometimes the preacher just picks several characteristics of the Bible personage (some elements) to preach, instead of using the person or passage as a whole. In this case, biographical preaching is accused of being “atomistic” in its interpretation. Those on the redemptive-historical side argue that atomistic interpretation is an improper way of bridging the gap of history. I agree that there is a historical discontinuity between the people in the Bible times and the people in the pews today. Still, a preacher has to preach a relevant message. A relevant sermon means the preacher must draw a parallel between then and now. On the exemplary side Huyser says: “The characters of the biblical persons, however far separated from us by the ages, are mirrors for us. In them every Christian can see himself more or less clearly reflected This is concrete pictorial instruction accessible also to the uneducated and children.”⁶² Greidanus states, in *Sola Scriptura*, that the redemptive-historical side objects to the way the exemplary side connects “then” and “now,” by criticizing their overlook of the historical discontinuity between past and present. Although the exemplary side puts an equal sign between “then” and “now,” they understand that they cannot copy good deeds indiscriminately. They have to check

⁶² Huyser, *Het Exempel*, 178, quoted in Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 70.

the deed in a given historical text with the religious-ethical norms of Scripture. Only when the deed meets the requirement can it be worthy of our imitation; this approach results in preachers only picking a few particulars in the biblical character as examples for us (and not the total person, or all of his deeds). The redemptive side defines the process of isolating certain “atoms” within the text from the central idea of the given text “the atomistic interpretation.”⁶³ Howerda looks at the outcome of this way of bridging the historical gap:

Either all kinds of practical remarks are tacked onto the several parts of the text with the result that the sermon, because the main thought was not caught, does not exhibit any unity and the hearers complain that it sticks together like sand – either that, or the sermon centers around one particular “atom” which has been abstracted from the totality of the text.⁶⁴

The point to note here is the accusation: that the exemplary approach does not preach the central thrust of the text but some loose, subjective, arbitrary elements set apart from the progressive redemptive history. However, since Muilenburg (in his 1968 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature) launched “rhetorical criticism” (focusing on the unity of form and content, and the structural patterns and literary devices),⁶⁵ biographical preaching has taken advantage of this methodology to find the central thrust (big idea) in the given text. For example, the plot analysis is a significant way to lead to the idea or the theme of the text. In 1978, from the perspective of rhetorical criticism, Clines speaks of the theme in *Theme of the Pentateuch*: “The theme of a narrative work may . . . be regarded as a conceptualizing of its plot, . . . in

⁶³ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 63-64, 70-72.

⁶⁴ Holwerda, *Begonnen*, 92, quoted in Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 63.

⁶⁵ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 58-59.

conceptualizing plot, theme tends to focus its significance and state its implications.”⁶⁶

Bar-Efrat also says, in *Narrative Art in the Bible* (1989), “[T]he plot of a narrative is constructed as a meaningful chain of interconnected events. . . The plot serves to organize events in such a way as to arouse the reader’s interest and emotional involvement, while at the same time imbuing the events with meaning.”⁶⁷ Arthurs agrees, in his work *Preaching with Variety*: “Through plot, the authors *show* readers truth. They show us that God is sovereign (Job), that sinners who feel guilty try to hide their sin (Saul), . . . they communicate ideas obliquely rather than stating them baldly as in genres like epistle and law.”⁶⁸ Arthurs also notes the first function of the plot is to highlight ideas.⁶⁹ However, plot is not the only way to gain the central idea. As Borden says, in “Is there Really One Big Idea in That Story?” in *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*: “[E]ach narrative communicates a big idea that is unique.” He continues: “The storyteller (in this case ultimately the Holy Spirit) often communicates the major idea through the words that are uttered by the characters. . . . Sometimes the idea is developed more through the design, plot, action, and so on, than through the dialogue.”⁷⁰

Regarding finding the theme of the text, Greidanus also agrees, in *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (1988): “With their structural patterns, biblical authors provide contemporary preachers with clues to the theme or motif of the selected preaching text.”

⁶⁶ Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 17-18, quoted in Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 223.

⁶⁷ Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art In The Bible* (New York: T&T Clark International, 1989), 93.

⁶⁸ Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 69.

⁶⁹ Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 71.

⁷⁰ Paul Borden, “Is There Really One Big Idea in That Story?” in *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Keith Willhite & Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 74.

He continues, “Thus the focus and theme of a passage may be revealed by its structure, whether that be repetition, inclusion, parallelism, or chiasm.”⁷¹

Therefore, biographical preaching is able to gain the central thrust of the given text, from which we may develop the message God intends to speak to us. Robinson says in *Biblical Preaching* (1980): “Old Testament theology comes packaged in narratives of men and women . . . Through the story you communicate ideas. In a narrative sermon . . . a major idea continues to be supported by other ideas . . . woven together . . . and all the points develop the central idea of the sermon.”⁷² Understood in this way, all the concerns of using loose, subjective, arbitrary elements of the text in biographical preaching are vaporized. Biographical preaching is not atomistic interpretation; on the contrary, it is able to deliver a message with a unified central thrust.

After presenting the literature review of the first argument about atomistic interpretation, I offer the literature review of the second argument about the legitimacy of identifying common people with Bible Characters. Greidanus introduces in *Sola Scriptura* that the redemptive-historical apologists admit that they are not supposed to neglect the personages in the text. In regards to their focus on God and His work in Christ, these apologists view human deeds as a reaction to God’s action. God works in and through his people. The redemptive-historical approach also contends that the Bible records the events of these people, not because they were pious or ungodly examples for

⁷¹ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 64-65.

⁷² Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1980), 130.

us, but because they have specific task for advancing the kingdom of God.⁷³ Overall, Greidanus is on the redemptive side; however, he has a different viewpoint on this issue. Greidanus contends that we cannot take every man mentioned as an office bearer preparing the coming of Christ. He views historical texts as a proclamation of God's actions, and the men in the Bible are the media God uses to proclaim God's acts to their descendents. Although he stands with the redemptive-historical side rejecting biographical preaching, he has a wider angle to see that some of the Bible figures in the narrative function as representatives for the first hearers.⁷⁴ Later on, Greidanus speaks of this issue in "The Question of Identifying with Bible Characters" in *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*. He admits that modern preachers need to discover analogies between Bible characters and men in the pew today in order to draw parallels between the past and now. He says: "[T]he matter of identification with Bible characters is too important simply to dismiss."⁷⁵ Although he values the "method of overhearing" proposed by Craddock and the "learning lessons with Bible characters" Henry Mitchell recommends for identifying with Bible characters, Greidanus still thinks such methods lack control, are subjective, arbitrary, and neglect the intention of the authors.⁷⁶ Thus, Greidanus sets forth his "Controlled Use of Identification" Principle by asking two questions: First, Did the author intend his original hearers to identify with a certain character? For example, patriarchs are the figures with whom Israel should identify. After recognizing an exemplary model, we may ask: What did the author intend for us to

⁷³ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 147.

⁷⁴ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 146-147, 215, 219, 225.

⁷⁵ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 179.

⁷⁶ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 175-179.

learn from this model? Second, from what perspective did the author expect his hearers to understand the story? Greidanus still keeps all mentioned parallels theocentric (i.e., focusing on God's acts for his kingdom) and the identification applied to God's covenant people Israel (but not individuals).⁷⁷

In view of Fee and Stuart's "three levels of narrative" (see above), Greidanus's improved identification is related to the second level only. However biographical preaching speaks more of the first level's stories and characters. The Bible authors use this wealth of means in moulding the individual characters in order to transmit biblical value and perspectives. Bar-Efrat states, in *Narrative Art in the Bible*, the importance of the characterization of those individual biblical characters:

Many of the views embodied in the narrative are expressed through the characters . . . what is and is not related about them . . . all reveal the values and norms within the narrative, . . . The decisions they are called upon to make . . . and the results of these decisions, provide undisputable evidence of the narrative's ethical dimension. The characters can also transmit the significance and values of the narrative to the reader, since they usually constitute the focal point of interest. . . They generally arouse considerable emotional involvement; we feel what they feel, . . . understand their motives and desires. We follow their struggles . . . when they speak to one another they are also addressing us.⁷⁸

Stevens and Musial explain in *Reading, Discussing, and Writing about the Great Books* (1970), the influence of Bible characters (especially the protagonist) on us from the angle of "experimental living": "We should consider the hero as one who makes an ultimate experiment – as one taking some line of action which in effect tests the kind of

⁷⁷ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 179-181.

⁷⁸ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art In The Bible*, 47.

life he believes in. This way of reading considers the character . . . as one who pursues his experiment to its final stages and within a situation of ultimate meaning.”⁷⁹

Ryken consents to their idea and makes a further step to point out the result of this kind of experiment in *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (1984): “This experiment in living is tested during the course of the action, and its final success or failure is a comment on the adequacy of the protagonist’s morality or world view on which the experiment was based.”⁸⁰ Furthermore, Ryken asks us to perceive that the protagonist of a story has an important role in the given episode:

The protagonist of a story is intended to be representative or exemplary of a whole segment of humanity, and perhaps of the whole human race. . . . if we can see our own experience in the events and characters of the story, the story has captured something universal about life. . . . what happens to the characters in the story is somehow a model of the enduring human situation.⁸¹

Therefore, we who intend to understand the biblical story must pay attention to the protagonist. Ryken says: “In interpreting a hero story, therefore, we cannot go wrong if we focus on the protagonist. The hero’s conflicts and encounters comprise the plot of the story, and we can organize our understanding and discussion of the story around them.”⁸² Arthurs points out forthrightly, in *Preaching with Variety*, that the primary rhetorical function of character is “identification,” and he consents to Ryken’s idea to read through the story as a “traveling companion of the protagonist.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Stevens and Musial, *Reading, Discussing, and Writing about the Great Books*, 24, quoted in Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 83.

⁸⁰ Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 43.

⁸¹ Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 43-44.

⁸² Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 76.

⁸³ Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 76.

Furthermore, he even stresses from the perspective of homiletics: “[T]he third-person narrative sermon creates identification with the main character. Listeners need to see themselves as Abraham tested, Zacchaeus seeking, or Ruth destitute. Without sympathetic connection, the sermon will lack credibility.”⁸⁴ Thus, regarding the issue of identifying the Bible characters, from the hermeneutic and homiletic perspective, it is legitimate to identify the protagonist and learn the lessons with the hero or heroine in a genuinely comparable situation in biographical preaching.

Conclusion

To recapitulate the forgoing: We have seen that all arguments against biographical preaching can be solved by a full understanding of the genre’s rules and devices under consideration of what the original hearers heard and what the authors intended to say. As Fee and Stuart state in *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*:

The fact that the Bible has a human side God chose to use almost every available kind of communication: narrative history . . . biographical sketches . . . To interpret properly the ‘then’ and ‘there’ of the biblical texts, you must not only know some general rules that apply to all the words of the Bible, but you also need to learn the special rules that apply to each of these literary forms (genres).⁸⁵

Walter Kaiser Jr. gives a more forthright and pertinent admonition, in “I Will Remember the Deeds of the Lord: the Meaning of Narrative” in *Introduction To Biblical Hermeneutics*: “The interpretation of narrative must give priority to the literary devices and the literary structure if we are to be successful in interpreting this very abundant

⁸⁴ Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 92.

⁸⁵ Fee & Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 22-23.

genre.”⁸⁶ Accordingly, with the proper guidance of the rule of the genre, we are able to gain a right entry into doing justice to the text in preparing biographical sermons. As such the goal of my thesis project will be reached: the flaws of biographical preaching can be avoided by training pastors to be sensitive to genre. In the next chapter, I will outline out my project design. My first goal is to apply these principles, guidelines, and literary craft mentioned above to some Chinese pastors in Toronto.

⁸⁶ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “I Will Remember the Deeds of the Lord: The Meaning of Narrative,” in Kaiser JR. and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 137.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

In Chapter 1, I stated that the thesis of this project is the following: The hermeneutical flaws of biographical preaching in Chinese churches can be avoided by training the Chinese pastors to preach biographical sermons with sensitivity to genre. In Chapter 2, I built up the biblical and theological foundation for biographical preaching. I also gave a brief literature review of the books related to this project in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I will describe how I applied all that I had learned from the Bible, theologians, literary critics and homileticians to prepare a biographical training manual and a field test for evaluating the outcome. My project design for biographical preaching workshop covers the following six areas: the setting of this project; the pre-assessment of the sermons of the registering-pastors; the goals of the training; a brief sketch of the training manual; the workshop exercises; and the plan for outcome evaluation for field test use.

The Setting of the Project

According to the survey I conducted in 2009, many Chinese pastors in Toronto have never received training in narrative preaching (Appendix E), let alone biographical training guided by knowledge of the narrative genre. Therefore, in November of 2010, I conducted a biographical training workshop for Chinese pastors who serve in Toronto. Twelve pastors attended, but only seven completed the whole course. My analyses (except the pre-assessment of the sermons of the twelve pastors in Appendix G), therefore, are based on these seven trainees. There is great diversity among these seven

pastors— variations in denominations, experience in ministry, congregational background and gender. (The detailed profile of attending pastors is listed in Appendix F). The different denominations represented in the sample include Presbyterian, Baptist, Gospel, Alliance, and Independent. The longest duration of service reported is thirty-five years, while the shortest is five years. The congregations among the pastors' churches are composed of different backgrounds, including people from Taiwan, Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Vietnam. Some are naturalized Canadian citizens, while others are new immigrants. Among these seven pastors, one is female. The reason I invited these pastors of such diverse backgrounds was to enhance the evaluation of the outcome of this training in a wider perspective.

The Pre-assessment of the Sermons of the Registering Pastors

Every attending pastor was required to submit one biographical sermon before attending the workshop. The purpose of this requirement was for me to understand how the pastors handled a biographical sermon. Upon review of the twelve registering pastors' sermons, I found a number of flaws common to their preaching of biographical sermons. For example, one sermon spoke of the biography of Moses. The pastor described how gentle Moses was to God and to men, and that we should follow his example. This is an example of what the critics call "moralizing." Another pastor compared every detail of the account of Abraham's offering of his son with Jesus' experiences; for example, Abraham had traveled "three" days before he offered his son, and Jesus ministered "three" years in the land of Israel before he died. This is an example of an overly typological interpretation. One pastor wrote a sermon about

Joseph. He depicted Joseph's string of victories on different trials (slavery, sexual temptation, unjust imprisonment, etc.), and without mentioning about God's deeds (i.e. vision from God, God's presence, and capability from God to interpret dreams). This pastor's sermon was man-centered, moralizing and confined in the past tense. Another sermon was about Philip, the Lord's disciple. Similarly to the previous participant, this pastor moralized his sermon by describing Philip's weaknesses and mistakes, and encouraging the congregation to act in an opposite manner. For example, the pastor analyzed how Philip did not have faith in the Lord's provision (Jn 6:7)—he then proceeded to exhort his congregation to pray in faith and depend on God's provision. The pastor also imagined that Philip did not understand Jesus' heart, when he recruited the help of Andrew to bring the Greeks to Christ's presence (Jn 12:20-22). Regarding Philip's thought-process, there are other possible explanations for his action that could bring about different conclusions about Philip's character. Critics referred this way of exegesis as "psychologizing".

One sermon focused on Samson. The pastor merely selected some characteristics of Samson to talk about, rather than carefully examine the whole story of Samson. Such a method is considered to be "atomistic interpretation," that is, subjective and arbitrary. The pastor also compared the condition before and after Samson's eyes were gouged to Samson's spiritual sight and blindness; such an interpretation is known as "spiritualizing." Other sermons also carried anthropocentric, man-centered, atomistic, and psychologizing problems (Appendix G). Moreover, I was most alarmed to discover that no one used the narrative-form of the text for their sermons (Appendix G). Through all these observations I had a greater burden to share what I had learned about narrative

and preaching, and I developed a clear direction to lead the pastors in preaching biographical sermons.

The Goal of the Training

The pastors' busy schedule in ministry limited the time they were available to attend the workshop. In view of the time-limitations and their needs, I was compelled to focus on a finite set of goals for this workshop. After receiving this training, the pastors should be able to:

1. Identify the flaws of biographical sermons.
2. Perceive the biblical/theological foundation of biographical preaching.
3. Know the key features of narrative literature.
4. Articulate the central idea of the narrative text.
5. Gain a preliminary idea of structural patterns and literary devices beneficial for exegesis of the Old Testament narrative
6. Comprehend the major types of biographical sermons.
7. Develop a biographical sermon outline in narrative form from a narrative passage.

With these seven explicit goals, I developed my training manual accordingly.

The Topics in the Training Manual

The hypotheses underlying this manual (in view of the background of the attending pastors) are as follows: first, since the pastors have many years of experience in preaching, they are supposed to understand basic theories of preaching (ex: the

purpose of preaching), the stages of the sermon (ex: introduction, body and conclusion), and preaching skills (ex: communication skills) which I will not address in this manual. Second, the pastors have a basic comprehension in studying the Bible characters for preparing the biographical sermon (i.e. the meaning of the central character's name, family background, calling and exploits, character analysis, etc. –w I will not speak of such details in this workshop).

Based on the goals already set, hypotheses understood, and the time span available, I decided to speak of the following topics in this manual (Appendix H):

1. Four improper ways of preaching biographical sermons: Spiritualizing, Psychologizing, Moralizing, and Typologizing.
2. Biblical/Theological foundation of biographical preaching: theory of imitation; Fee & Stuart's three levels of narrative; the relationship between biblical character and the intended meaning of the narrative where the character is found.
3. Four key features of narrative: plot, character, setting, point of view.
4. Achieving the Big Idea: Robinson's way of forming a central idea through discovering a subject and complement in the text.
5. Structural pattern: chiasm and the theme of a passage revealed in chiastic structure.
6. Literary devices benefit exegesis of narrative: the repetition of sounds and words; the narrator's point of view; identification with the protagonist; dialogue and the style of narrative unit.

7. How to design narrative sermons: a sermon moves from opening disequilibrium through escalation of conflict to surprising reversal to closing denouement.¹
8. Major types of biographical sermons: whole-life biographical sermon; life-portion biographical sermon; multiple-character biographical sermon.²
9. How to design a third-person biographical sermon.

Regarding the order of the arrangement of the material, I designed this training manual in line with the narrative form (problem-solution arrangement); that is, I set forth the flaws of traditional biographical sermons (problem), then I introduced why and how the knowledge and techniques distilled from a genre-sensitive study of narrative not only avoids these flaws but also does justice to the narrative passage by delivering the same message (big idea) the author intended to speak to the first hearers (solution). Further, I designed a document listing all key figures of preparing a biographical sermon for trainees, such as character, setting, point of view, literary features, plot, first reader, subject/complement, exegetical idea, theological idea, preaching idea, sermon outline, God-centered, historical gap (Appendix I), that they may have an overall idea of what should be heeded as well as what should be done accordingly.

Workshop Exercises

The manual was for use in the workshop; besides all teaching material, I also prepared a pre-test and practice items as follows:

¹ Eugene L. Lowry, *How to preach a Parable: Design for Narrative Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 25.

² Roy E. De Brand, *Guide to Biographical Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 45-57.

Pre-Test

I designed a pre-test, which would be answered by the trainees before I taught (Appendix J). The purpose of the pre-test was not only for me to familiarize myself with the pastors, but also to provide them with an opportunity for self-reflection, regarding the discussion topics. For example, in the pre-test, I asked the pastors to critically analyze a sermon outline (which carries typical moralizing issues) to see if they would be able to discern the problems or not.

Practice

During the class, I interpreted the issue, initiated a discussion, and illustrated concrete examples. Then, I gave the pastors a passage to practice on, to assure that they really understood how to apply the principle. For example, after I taught them that the plot typically moves through five stages, I gave them an example (i.e. Luke 19:1-10).³ Afterwards, I asked them to practice analyzing the five stages of the passage Gen. 22:1-19. When they were done, I showed them an example of an exegetical outline from an experienced homiletician.⁴

The Plan for Outcome Evaluation

In order to understand the effectiveness of this workshop, I designed a post-test (Appendix K) in order to gain the general feedback and sermon outline design.

³ Jeffrey Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 70.

⁴ Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 55-56.

General Feedback

Feedback through a Post-Test

I designed five questions to be answered (multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank) in order to understand if the pastors would perceive and remember some important ideas (i.e. the characteristics of narrative, big idea, and narrative form sermon) from this training.

Feedback through Rating

I designed a rating feedback device from five perspectives in order to see which area would benefit them the most or least (ex: discerning the flaws of biographical sermon, forming the big idea, making out a narrative form sermon, and overall evaluation).

Sermon Outline Design

After this training, the pastors were required to design a sermon outline in narrative form. I chose the text 2 Kings 4: 1-7 and I observed if they would be capable of developing the central idea through the outline similar to the problem-solution arrangement.

Summary

I designed this manual for training Chinese pastors, focusing on the skills that they lack—the awareness of the flaws of biographical preaching and the training of narrative preaching. Through pre-test, post-test, explanation, visual presentation (power point material), discussion, illustration, practice, comparison, and helpful tools provided in the workshop, I expected all trainees to receive the equipment to preach biographical sermons biblically. It is God’s grace that these seven pastors, all from diverse backgrounds, but with the same passion for preaching God’s Word faithfully, came and learned together on two half-days without distraction. In the next chapter, I will present the outcomes and the future outlook of this project.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES

After conducting two half days of biographical training workshop (seven hours in total) on November 8th and 15th 2010, I collected the participants' answers to the pre-test (Appendix J) and post-test (Appendix K). Upon collection, I conducted some analyses in order to see the effectiveness of this training. In this chapter I will articulate the following: first, the summary and analyses of the outcomes; second, the benefits and lessons I learned from this project; third, the improvement of this manual; fourth, the future outlook of this training project.

Summary and Analysis of the Outcomes

As a training workshop, I designed a post-test that would measure the outcomes of the field testing. First, I wanted to know if the pastors were able to understand the basic characteristics of the narrative genre. Second, I wanted to make sure that the pastors learned the two components of forming a big idea. Third, I wanted to get an objective answer from the participants to see if they knew the characteristic of the narrative sermon form. Fourth, I wanted to receive a report on the participants' subjective feedback regarding the benefits they gained from this workshop. Fifth, the last item I wanted to know was if the participants understood how to apply what they learned in the workshop in shaping a biographical sermon outline in narrative form.

Based on the above five categories, I analyzed the outcomes of post-test of the workshop (see Appendix M):

Knowing the Basic Characteristics of Narrative Literature (Questions 1& 2)

Regarding Question 1, I expected the trainees to remember four key features of the narrative literature: plot, character, setting, and point of view. I compare the answers of the post-test (Appendix M), which was conducted at the end of the workshop on Nov. 15th, 2010, with the pre-test (Nov. 8th, 2010). (Appendix L).

	The number of correct answers (post-test)	The number of correct answers (pre-test)
Pastor 1	3	2
Pastor 2	4	2
Pastor 3	3	3
Pastor 4	3	2
Pastor 5	3	3
Pastor 6	1	3
Pastor 7	3	0
Total	20	13
Average	2.85	1.85

Table 3. Comparison of Post- and Pre-Tests Regarding the Understanding of the Four Key Features of the Narrative Literature

In the pre-test, the average questions answered correctly (four questions in total) is 1.85 out of 4, with a percentage of 46.25%. The post-test shows an average of 2.85, and a percentage of 71.25%. Indeed, the trainees improved in their knowledge of narrative literature. However, I was not quite satisfied with the improvement. I believed that they might have better retained the information gleaned from the workshop if they had more time to learn.

Regarding Question 2 of post-test, all trainees gave correct answers (Appendix M), stating the typical five stages of plot development in correct sequence. Before this workshop the trainees did not understand the plot-issue, because six of seven pastors were unfamiliar with narrative preaching (Appendix F). It is obvious that they

understood the basic ideas of how a plot moves in a passage after this training. I was satisfied with this result.

Understanding the Basic Elements of a Big Idea (Question 3)

In regard to the concept of an idea consisting of only two essential elements, the participants scored rather poorly in the initial questionnaire. The pre-test shows that six of the seven participating pastors had not heard of the concept of a big idea. The percentage of pastors unfamiliar with the big idea was 85.7%, which means that only 14.28% were cognizant of the process of forming a big idea. In the post-test, five of seven participants responded correctly to the “big idea” question. The percentage of pastors who answered this question correctly to total participants is 71.4%, and the improvement is obvious. However, I was not satisfied with this result and I believed the pastors would have produced better results, had they more time to practice.

Understanding the Characteristic of the Narrative Sermon (Questions 4-5)

Appendix F shows that all (but one) of the pastors did not know about narrative preaching. Through the answers to Questions 4 & 5 (Appendix M), I found that all seven pastors chose the right answers— this meant that they understood the three steps of preparing a narrative sermon, and that they perceived that the problem-solution arrangement is closely related to the narrative style. The percentage of the correctness of these two questions is 100% respectively. I was very satisfied with this improvement.

After analyzing these objective results of the post-test, in the following item, I submit all attending pastors’ subjective feedback (from Question 6 of the post-test in

Appendix K), which was ranked on a scale between 1 to 10 (10 representing “most helpful” and 1 being “helpless.”)

Feedback on the Workshop of Biblical Biographical Preaching Training

According to the answers to the Sub-question a to e (under Question 6) (Appendix K), all trainees provided their subjective self-evaluation on this workshop.

	a	b	c	d	e	Average
Pastor 1	10	10	10	10	10	10
Pastor 2	8	6	7	9	10	8
Pastor 3	10	10	9	9	10	9.6
Pastor 4	8	8	10	10	10	9.2
Pastor 5	10	8	10	7	10	9
Pastor 6	7	7	7	7	10	7.6
Pastor 7	8	8	8	9	9	8.4
Average	8.7	8.1	8.7	8.7	9.8	8.8

Table 4. Feedback on the Workshop

Based on the statistics of the table above, there are three points that I must address: First, the average score of Sub-question a is 8.7/10. This shows that many of the pastors expressed that this workshop helped them understand the flaws of the biographical sermon. This high score is parallel to the subjective experience I perceived in the process of training. When I finished the topic of the alleged flaws of biographical sermons (such as spiritualizing, moralizing, psychologising, and typologizing), all attending pastors admitted that they had inappropriately interpreted (more or less) the text when they attempted biographical sermons. The flaws were so ingrained in the participants' sermon-preparation that one pastor even questioned what other methods were available. He wondered if the flawed-approaches could no longer be used. Indeed, this sentiment indicated a strong need for helping Chinese pastors avoid these flaws of biographical sermons. Second, sub-questions b, c, d are related to understanding the

genre of narrative literature. These three questions also received high scores (8.1, 8.7, 8.7), which means that this workshop was helpful for the pastors to get to know the characteristics of narrative literature. Third, sub-question e concerns the evaluation of this biographical preaching workshop in an overall perspective. This question received high scores (9.8/10), further suggesting that there is a strong need for Chinese pastors to learn how to preach biblical biographical sermons guided by an understanding of genre sensitivity. The response to this question also shows that this manual was very effective in developing the pastors' understanding of biblical biographical preaching.

After analyzing all trainees' understanding on narrative literature and feedback on this workshop, in the next item, I evaluate the outcome of their application of the narrative-form to biographical sermon.

Building a Narrative-Form Biographical Sermon

Prior to commencing my teaching on narrative sermons, I asked the trainees to develop a sermon outline on 2 Kings 4:1-7. After finishing the training session, I asked the pastors to rewrite a new sermon outline on the same passage, treating the sermon as a "story."

In the trainees' first assignment, I found a number of shortcomings: some sermons merely just retold the story from the text; other sermons were developed from an anthropocentric viewpoint without escalation of the material arranged and plot form. In contrast to the previous one, the post-test shows that all trainees designed their new outlines through the problem-solution arrangement. For example, all seven pastors began their sermon outlines by stating the widow's problems, following with a

discussion about God's provision. Three pastors noticed that the problems of the widow were escalating to a climax (from the death of her God-fearing husband, to lacking money to pay her debts, to her two sons being taken away as slaves by the creditor). Upon the climax, God solved her problems through the miracle directed by Elisha with abundant provision.

In summary, the analyses and summary of the outcomes not only provide the evidence of the need for training in the area of biographical preaching with genre sensitivity for Chinese pastors but also suggests objectively the effectiveness of this training manual.

Benefits and Lessons

During the time I prepared this project, I received much wisdom from scholars and homileticians. I did not have a clear picture of the flaws of biographical preaching until I prepared this project. As I continued in my research, I developed ideas on how to improve on these shortcomings from the vantage of genre sensitivity. Through the progression of preparing this project, I also had many chances to apply what I learned from all predecessors to my sermon-preparation. I experienced the power and effectiveness of the narrative sermon form—indeed, the narrative sermon truly catches hearers' attention and touches their hearts. In the past year, based on the fruitful result of studying, I had faith and courage to preach a series of sermons on Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Generally speaking, young men seldom approach the pastor to discuss their thoughts on his sermons, but one day, when I finished preaching a sermon on Jacob's wrestling with God at Peniel, two young men came to me, showing appreciation for my

sermon. This was the first time they did so, even though they had grown up in the church. I am glad that God touched them, and I know that such was the work of the Holy Spirit. However, I am also indebted to all the theologians, literary critics, and homileticians for their help.

As I implemented this project, I perceived some of the needs of our fellow pastors. First, many pastors need to be more alert as to what they preach. Attending pastors admitted they were not aware of having conducted such homiletical errors when they attempted to bridge the historical gap in the text in their past sermons. All pastors should always remember the verse 2 Timothy 2:15: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” Second, pastors need to have advanced study in the art of narrative preaching. If they did not take this course in seminary, it is important for them to receive “on-the-job training” or engage in a seminary-level course, that they may do justice to the text (especially considering that narrative is the largest genre of the Bible). Third, pastors need to know that biblical biographical preaching (guided by genre sensitivity) is able to be achieved.

In summary, the implementation of this project not only blesses me in improving my biographical preaching, but also others’ abilities, through my service.

The Improvement of this Manual

The objective of this project is Chinese pastors in Toronto. Through this training workshop, I found that the length (seven hours) was not adequate to target all the elements of the manual. Indeed, I (and the participants) needed more time to discuss

certain topics and assignments. If I have another chance to conduct this kind of workshop, I will expand the time-requirement to nine hours and improve and enlarge my manual in the following ways: first, I will add more practice exercises (regarding “subject and complement” matters) on forming a big idea. Second, I will expand on the explanation about finding the theme of the text (exegetical idea) and how to move from a homiletical idea to a preaching idea. Third, I will speak more of the formation of a narrative sermon, including the following elements: running the story; delaying the story; suspending the story; alternating the story.¹ Fourth, I will strengthen participants’ artistic sensitivity by displaying more biographical sermon samples, such as Robinson and Sunukjian’s works. Fifth, I limited the scope of the workshop to “third person” biographical preaching. If I have another opportunity to conduct this workshop, I wish to teach “first person” biographical preaching.

The Future Outlook of this Training Project

I was grateful to have this opportunity to share what I had learned to my fellow pastors in Toronto. From their encouraging feedback, I would like to take some further steps to become a blessing to more people, if it is God’s will:

Opportunities

I hope to have opportunities to share this material with more Chinese pastors in Toronto, equipping them to preach biblical biographical sermons. Then, they may preach this kind of sermons faithfully and effectively. I also believe that there is not only

¹ Eugene L. Lowry, *How to Preach A Parable: Design for Narrative Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

a need of preaching biblical biographical sermons for Chinese pastors in Toronto, but also in Taiwan and Mainland China. I hope to have the chance to serve those pastors as well.

Seminary Setting

Generally speaking, it is difficult for pastors to make time to attend these workshops without distraction (let alone having the discretionary time to practice the exercises). To enhance the effectiveness of learning, I hope to expand my material to train future pastors in the setting of a seminary course. Seminary students have more time to contemplate, study, practice and reflect. Indeed, a seminary course would enhance the effectiveness of the embedded material.

Form of Textbook

I expect to have this manual expanded to a book in print. Up till now, in the world of Chinese Christianity I can hardly find a textbook on narrative preaching, let alone a book on biblical biographical preaching. If God allows, I wish to write a book about narrative preaching combined with biographical preaching.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis project has opened my eyes and heart. I have not only experienced the growth of my perception of theology and preaching, but also generated a heavy burden to preach God's truth faithfully, powerfully and effectively. Since this material has already helped some pastors improve their sermon preparation, I plead that

God would use this material to bless more preachers, that I might partake in the revival of the pulpit of the Chinese Church!

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Personal Information

1. How many years have you served as a pastor? _____ How many years in the Greater Toronto Area? _____
2. The denomination of your church is
(a) Baptist (b) Presbyterian (c) Christian & Missionary Alliance (d) Associated Gospel Churches (e) Other denomination (f) Non-denomination or Independent church

B. Preaching Experience

1. Have you ever read the book *Prayer of Jabez* (published in 2000)?
(a) Yes (b) No
2. In regarding to the interpretation of 1 Chro 4: 9~10 of *the Prayer of Jabez*, you
(a) Agreed (b) Disagreed (c) Didn't have any comment
3. Based on the standpoint of agreement or disagreement mentioned above, did you preach from the passage of 1Chro 4: 9~10 on Sunday worship, when *the Prayer of Jabez* was overwhelmingly welcomed by the Christian community?
(a) Yes (b) No
4. Have you ever taken any academic course on how to preach biblical narrative?
(a) Yes (b) No
5. Have you received any training in preaching biographical sermon?
(a) Yes (b) No
6. How many times have you preached a biographical sermon in the past two years?
(a) None (b) Once (c) Twice (d) More than two times
7. Have you received any training in "First-Person Biblical Preaching?"
(a) Yes (b) No
8. How many times have you preached first-person sermon in the past two years?
(a) None (b) Once (c) Twice (d) More than two times

APPENDIX B

SURVEY RESULTS

For the reason of confidentiality, all 36 respondents remain anonymous. GTA represents the years the pastor serving in Greater Toronto Area.

Name	Denomination	years	GTA	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Pastor 1	Baptist	33	23	b	c	b	b	a	d	b	a
Pastor 2	Baptist	33	23	a	b	b	b	b	b	b	a
Pastor 3	Baptist	28	19	a	a	a	b	a	d	b	a
Pastor 4	Baptist	35	7.5	a	a	b	a	a	d	a	a
Pastor 5	Presbyterian	12	12	a	c	b	b	b	d	b	a
Pastor 6	Alliance	9	9	b	c	b	b	b	d	b	a
Pastor 7	Alliance	12	10	b	c	b	a	b	d	a	a
Pastor 8	Alliance	17	14	a	c	b	a	a	d	b	a
Pastor 9	Alliance	13	13	b	c	b	b	b	d	b	a
Pastor 10	Alliance	12	12	b	c	b	a	a	b	a	b
Pastor 11	Alliance	35	16	b	c	b	a	a	d	b	a
Pastor 12	Alliance	34	19	a	c	b	a	a	d	b	a
Pastor 13	Alliance	25	25	a	a	b	b	b	d	b	a
Pastor 14	AGC	20	8	b	c	b	b	b	d	b	a
Pastor 15	Other	15	15	a	b	b	a	b	d	a	a
Pastor 16	Non	8	8	a	a	b	b	b	d	b	a
Pastor 17	Non	23	23	a	c	b	a	b	d	a	a
Pastor 18	Non	35	25	b	c	b	b	b	a	b	a
Pastor 19	Non	19	9	b	c	b	b	a	c	b	a
Pastor 20	Alliance	7	7	a	c	b	a	b	d	b	a
Pastor 21	Alliance	4	4	a	c	b	b	b	b	b	a
Pastor 22	Baptist	12	12	a	a	b	b	b	d	b	a
Pastor 23	Alliance	24	23	a	b	a	a	a	d	a	a
Pastor 24	Presbyterian	18	18	a	a	b	a	b	a	b	a
Pastor 25	Non	16	6	a	b	b	b	a	d	a	a
Pastor 26	Baptist	32	14	b	c	b	b	b	d	b	a
Pastor 27	Baptist	30	25	a	b	b	b	a	c	a	a
Pastor 28	Baptist	40	37	a	a	b	b	a	d	b	b
Pastor 29	AGC	5.5	5.5	a	a	b	b	b	c	b	a
Pastor 30	AGC	11	11	b	c	b	b	b	a	b	a
Pastor 31	Non	15	15	a	a	a	a	a	d	b	a
Pastor 32	Other	34	13	a	b	a	b	a	d	a	d
Pastor 33	Other	17	17	a	a	b	b	b	d	a	c
Pastor 34	Baptist	34	19	a	a	a	b	b	d	a	a
Pastor 35	AGC	28	13	b	c	b	a	a	d	b	a
Pastor 36	Alliance	29	12	a	a	b	a	b	d	b	a

APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Question	A	B	C	D	Total
1	24	12			36
2	12	6	18		36
3	5	31			36
4	14	22			36
5	15	21			36
6	3	3	3	27	36
7	11	25			36
8	32	2	1	1	36

APPENDIX D

SURVEY OF RESPONSE TO *THE PRAYER OF JABEZ*

Question	Answers	Number	%
Have read <i>The Prayer of Jabez</i>	Yes	24	67
	No	12	33
Opinion of interpretation	Agreed	12	33
	Disagreed	6	17
	No comment	18	50
Preached 1 Chro 4:9-10	Yes	5	14
	No	31	86

APPENDIX E

SURVEY OF PREACHING

Question	Answer	Number	%
Taken Narrative preaching course	Yes	14	39
	No	22	61
Trained in Biographical preaching	Yes	15	42
	No	21	58
Number of Biographical sermon in past two years	None	3	8.3
	Once	3	8.3
	Twice	3	8.3
	More than 2	27	75
Trained in First-person preaching	Yes	11	31
	No	25	69
Number of First-person sermon in past two years	None	32	89
	Once	2	5
	Twice	1	3
	More than 2	1	3

APPENDIX F

PROFILE OF THE ATTENDING PASTORS

All seven pastors remain anonymous to respect their privacy. Each pastor will be classified by number (from 1 to 7).

	Denomination	Gender	Years of pastoral ministry	Trained in narrative preaching	Congregational background
Pastor 1	Baptist	M	9	No	China
Pastor 2	Presbyterian	M	14	No	China, Taiwan
Pastor 3	Independent	F	23	No	Taiwan
Pastor 4	Independent	M	20	No	Taiwan
Pastor 5	Gospel	M	7	No	China
Pastor 6	Alliance	M	5	Self study	China
Pastor 7	Alliance	M	35	No	Vietnam, Hong Kong

APPENDIX G

PRE-ASSESSMENT ON SERMONS

	Character	Narrative Form	Flaws or problems
Pastor 1	Moses	No	Atomistic, out of context, moralizing, anthropocentric.
Pastor 2	Joseph	No	Typologizing, moralizing.
Pastor 3	Job	No	No unified theme, moralizing, subjective.
Pastor 4	Barnabas	No	The content is isolated in the past, moralizing.
Pastor 5	Philip-the evangelist	No	The content is isolated in the past, anthropocentric.
Pastor 6	Andrew	No	Neglect literary context, moralizing.
Pastor 7	Abram & Rot	No	Neglecting literary context and historical gap.
Pastor 8	Joseph	No	The content is isolated in the past, man-centered, moralizing.
Pastor 9	Samson	No	Atomistic interpretation, spiritualizing, moralizing.
Pastor 10	Philip-the disciple	No	The content is isolated in the past, psychologizing, moralizing.
Pastor 11	Hannah	No	Psychologizing, moralizing, man-centered.
Pastor 12	Joseph	No	Atomistic interpretation, psychologising, moralizing.

Note: Pastor 8-12 did not finish the workshop.

APPENDIX H
TOPICS IN THE TRAINING MANUAL

1. The Propositions of this Manual
2. The Value of Biographical Preaching
3. The dispute about Biographical Preaching
4. The Reasons of Preaching Biographical Sermon
5. The Characteristics of the genre of Narrative
6. The Central Idea of a Passage and the Preaching Idea
7. The Chiastic Structure
8. The Exegetical Help through Understanding Narrative Literature
9. The Formation of Narrative Sermons
10. Major Types of Biographical Sermons

APPENDIX I

BIOGRAPHICAL SERMON PREPARATION CHART

Preaching Text: _____ Other Passage: _____

Character	
Setting	
Point of view	
Literary features	
Plot	
First reader	
Subject Complement	
Exegetical idea	
Theological idea	
Preaching idea	
Sermon outline	
God-centered	
Historical gap	
Others	

APPENDIX J

PRE-TEST

1. Have you been trained in narrative preaching? a. Yes (took course) b. Self study
c. No
2. Have you been trained in biographical preaching guided by the narrative genre?
a. Yes b. No
3. Is there theological truth in the Old Testament narrative? a. Yes b. No
4. What are the four key features of narrative literature? a. Grammar b. Word
c. Syntax d. Character e. Typology f. Setting g. Moral teaching h. Point of view
i. New Testament principle j. Plot k. Spiritualization l. Psychological analysis
5. Do you agree that the interpretation of the Old Testament narrative depends on the
New Testament? a. Yes b. No
6. Are you aware that the big idea comprises two elements: subject and complement?
a. Yes b. No If your answer is Yes, please give a brief explanation of each element:
Subject: _____
Complement: _____
7. What is the preaching idea of 2 Samuel: Ch11-12
8. Please comment on the following sermon outline (either merits or shortcomings, not
more than three comments)

John 21: 15-19 Jesus asks: "Do you love me . . . ?" → Do we love him (Jesus)?
Peter answers: "Yes, Lord. . ." → This should be our answer!
Jesus commands: "Feed my sheep." → We have a task.²
Genesis 32: 22-32
I. Jacob struggled (22-25)
II. Jacob was changed (26-28)

² Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 164.

III. Jacob was blessed (29-32)³

9. Please state the theme and draft a brief sermon outline on Gen 6-9 (Noah and the flood)

³ Roy E. De Brand, *Guide to Biographical Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 35.

APPENDIX K

POST-TEST

1. What are the primary four key features of narrative literature? a. Grammar
b. Word c. Syntax d. Character e. Typology f. Setting g. Moral teaching h. Point of view i. New Testament principle j. Plot k. Spiritualization l. Psychological analysis
2. What are the five typical stages moving through in a plot?

3. A big idea comprises two essential elements: _____
4. What are the three steps to designing a narrative sermon? a. Describe the background of the text, grammatical analysis, three main points and nine sub-points b. Communicate the central idea, design the sermon as a plot, build identification with the main character
5. What kind of content-arrangement is most like narrative sermon? a. Promise-fulfillment b. Problem-solution c. Explanation-application
6. Please evaluate the helpfulness of this workshop by indicating a number from one to ten (10 represents most helpful, 1 represents helpless)
 - a. Understanding the exegetical mistakes we tend to make in biographical sermons

 - b. Knowing how to discover the plot of the text _____
 - c. Knowing how to find the big idea of a thought unit and develop the theme of the sermon _____
 - d. Understanding how the characteristics of the narrative genre benefit the exegesis of the Old Testament narrative _____
 - e. Overall evaluation of this workshop (in view of improving your biographical sermon preparation) _____
7. Please develop a sermon outline on 2 King 4: 1-7 (in narrative form)

APPENDIX L

RESULTS OF PRE-TEST

Question 1-3

	Trained in narrative preaching	Trained in biographical preaching with genre sensitivity	Theological truth in narrative text
Pastor 1	No	No	Yes
Pastor 2	No	No	Yes
Pastor 3	No	No	Yes
Pastor 4	No	No	Yes
Pastor 5	No	No	Yes
Pastor 6	Self study	No	Yes
Pastor 7	No	No	Uncertain

Question 4-6

	Four key features of narrative text	OT narrative interpreted by NT text	Familiar with subject & complement
Pastor 1	2 (number of correct answers)	Yes	No
Pastor 2	2	Yes	No
Pastor 3	3	Uncertain	No
Pastor 4	2	Yes	No
Pastor 5	3	Yes	No
Pastor 6	3	Yes	Yes
Pastor 7	0	Yes	No

APPENDIX M

RESULTS OF POST-TEST

Question 1

	Pastor 1	Pastor 2	Pastor 3	Pastor 4	Pastor 5	Pastor 6	Pastor 7	Average
Number of correct answers	3	4	3	3	3	1	3	2.85

Question 2

	Pastor 1	Pastor 2	Pastor 3	Pastor 4	Pastor 5	Pastor 6	Pastor 7	Average
Number of correct answers	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

Question 3

	Pastor 1	Pastor 2	Pastor 3	Pastor 4	Pastor 5	Pastor 6	Pastor 7	%*
Number of correct answers	2	2	0	2	0	2	2	71.4

%* represents the percentage of correct answers.

Question 4

	Pastor 1	Pastor 2	Pastor 3	Pastor 4	Pastor 5	Pastor 6	Pastor 7	%*
Answer	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	100

%* represents the percentage of correct answers.

Question 5

	Pastor 1	Pastor 2	Pastor 3	Pastor 4	Pastor 5	Pastor 6	Pastor 7	%*
Answer	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	100

%* represents the percentage of correct answers.

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VITA

Daniel Lee was born November 22, 1953, in Taipei, Taiwan. He graduated from Soochow University in 1976 in Taipei with a Bachelor degree in Business Administration. In 1970, Daniel was born again and actively involved in ministry when he was a student. Ten years later, he received the calling from the Lord when he was working as a businessman. Daniel began his M.Div. study at Chinese Evangelical Seminary in 1980 in Taipei. In 1981, he married Jennie Lee and had two sons afterwards.

After graduation in 1983, Daniel taught at a Bible school for aboriginal young people in Taiwan, and then served as a pastor in a community church. In 1988, he moved to Toronto to pastor a church. He founded a Mandarin-speaking church in 1993 in Toronto and has served there ever since. His burden is to proclaim God's Word faithfully, effectively and powerfully. Daniel also wishes to share and help young seminary students to become effective preachers. Through completing the study of his D. Min. program, his vision will come true. He expects to receive his Doctor of Ministry degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in May 2011.

Daniel and Jennie have two adult sons David (married with Kristen Lee) and Jonathan living in Toronto, and the entire family wholeheartedly serves the Lord.